

DYAL SINGH PUBLIC LIBRARY
READING ROOM
8A, CANNUGHT PLACE,
NEW DELHI

READING ROOM

Cl. No. 823

D 36 P

Ac. No. 441

Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of 0.10 P. will be charged for each day the book is kept overtime.

6 APR 1946 2 (1410)

~~13 AUG 1996 (1284)~~

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

SHABBY SUMMER
FANTASIA
THE MALICE OF MEN
THE WOMAN AT THE DOOR
BLIND MAN'S YEAR
NO HERO—THIS
SACKCLOTH INTO SILK
TWO IN A TRAIN
THE MAN ON THE WHITE HORSE
SEVEN MEN CAME BACK
TWO BLACK SHEEP
SMITH
OLD WINE AND NEW
THE ROAD
SHORT STORIES
EXILES
ROPER'S ROW
OLD PYBUS
KITTY
DOOMSDAY
SORREL AND SON
SUVLA JOHN
THREE ROOMS
THE SECRET SANCTUARY
ORCHARDS
LANTERN LANE
SECOND YOUTH
COUNTESS GLIKA
CORN IN EGYPT
UNREST
REPRIEVE

THE PRIDE OF EVE
THE KING BEHIND THE KING
THE HOUSE OF SPIES
SINCERITY
FOX FARM
BESS OF THE WOODS
THE RED SAINT
THE SLANDERERS
THE RETURN OF THE PETTICOAT
A WOMAN'S WAR
VALOUR
BERTRAND OF BRITTANY
UTHER AND IGRAINE
THE HOUSE OF ADVENTURE
THE PROPHETIC MARRIAGE
APPLES OF GOD
THE LAME ENGLISHMAN
MARRIAGE BY CONQUEST
JOAN OF THE TOWER
MARTIN VALLIANT
THE RUST OF ROME
THE WHITE GATE
THE SEVEN STREAMS
MAD BARBARA
LOVE AMONG THE RUINS
THE MAN WHO WENT BACK
THE DARK HOUSE
I LIVE AGAIN
SLADE
MR. GURNEY AND MR. SLADE
LAUGHING HOUSE

PORTRAIT OF A PLAYBOY

by
WARWICK DEEPING



CASELL & COMPANY LTD.
LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE, SYDNEY



THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE
CONFORMITY WITH THE AUTHORIZED
ECONOMY STANDARDS

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
EBENEZER BAYLIS AND SON, LTD., THE
TRINITY PRESS, WORCESTER, AND LONDON

F.647

“CHOW, chow chow,” sang the Wryneck among the pines
On the hill above the white villa.

“Cuckoo, cuckoo—to you, my friend,” sang the man in the
long chair in the villa’s loggia.

Bougainvillæa and climbing pelargonium clashed in colour on the white walls and the pillars, but John Maxwell Tryte cultivated such dualities, clashes in colour, roistering contrasts, for was he not the personification of duality both in his crafts and in his temperament. A low, green table stood beside the chair, and on it were two or three books, a drawing pad, a stick of charcoal, and a long, pink coloured drink in a Venetian goblet.

The man chuckled. Cuckoo—cuckoo! Cuckoo to all the purists and the conventions! Moved by a mischievous impulse he reached for the pad and the charcoal and with incredible swiftness and deadly clarity sketched in one of his laughing impertinences. To him it was laughter, ribald yet witty laughter. To others it might have seemed otherwise.

Roberto, the Italian gardener, climbing the steps with a bouquet of carnations, smiled his oiled-sunlight smile at the man in the chair. Roberto was all white teeth and tousled coal black hair. Sometimes he sang at his work with amorous gusto. Roberto was married and had a family, but wine and women were in his blood.

“Ha—the flowers, Roberto. Incarnadined carnations. Strange, is it not, that the sweet things should be so partial to liquid manure?”

Roberto grinned. His English was scanty, and Tryte’s Italian imaginative, but Roberto gathered that everything Signor Tryte said was a joke. Yes, just as the signor himself was a joke but a pleasant and unparsimonious one.

“Shall I give them to Madame Bertrand?”

"No—shove 'em in my goblet. Let's see how they react to alcohol, Roberto. Become sentimental and seducible like the ladies."

Roberto did not understand, but since his master's hand was outstretched he passed him the carnations, and saw their grey-green stalks lowered into the pink drink.

This was indeed a jest, and Roberto's smile was brilliant.

"But they will not like it."

"Maybe they will, Roberto. Giggle like tipsy girls. Sops in wine, what! Oh, and Roberto, ask Madame to bring me another drink."

Roberto did not quite get the sense of it, but finding Madame Bertrand sewing at the staff-room window, he assumed that the master needed her for something.

Josephine Bertrand rose from her chair. She was large and solid, and black in dress and eyes and hair, handsome, serene and inscrutable. She might have passed in a pageant as Madame La France, swathed in a tricolour, and with a Phrygian cap on her head. She took her way through the cool of the house, past a room where two maids were chattering and out into the colour-festooned loggia. The chatter had ceased for a moment as that formidable figure had swept past. It began again like the twittering of two cage-birds.

"Yes, monsieur?"

"Oh—madame, please bring me another drink. The carnations have pinched my other one."

The woman stood and stared. Her large, vellum-white, yet intelligent face remained expressionless. If Monsieur Tryte chose to do grotesque and foolish things, that was his affair. Madame Bertrand was very well satisfied with her place. She could afford to be tolerant when Tryte left her to run the house as she pleased, and was open-handed. After all, he was rich and lavish in his richness.

"Certainly—monsieur. The same?"

"Just a little more absinthe in it."

The Villa Violet was to have a visitor. His thin, taut figure had passed along the curve of yellow sand where the blue bay

became rock and pines. Three small children were playing on this small semilune of sand and Captain Valentine Samson paused to watch them. He liked children, perhaps because being a sailor he had not had a surfeit of them, nor, as a matter of fact, had he any of his own. Captain Valentine Samson was suffering from retirement, and an incipient boredom which he fought as he would have fought the French, gun to gun, in the Nelson days. All the more reason for tautness in back, temper and chin. He strolled on into the shade of the pines, with the sea wantoning among the rocks below him, a blue, satiny sea, not the grey north where you watched and waited for ungentlemanly Germans.

So, the seaman came to the white gate of the Villa Violet and opened it, and climbed the stately steps of John Maxwell Tryte's southern sanctum. He did not hurry. In fact, he diverged to look at things, for, in retirement Captain Samson was compelling himself to look at things and study them, trees, flowers, insects, birds.

Maxwell Tryte had purchased the property from the executors of a noted and wealthy English woman who had created a unique garden here. Wherever you looked there was loveliness and if the garden had gone a little wild under Roberto's care, it was all the lovelier for that. Roses, violets, tulips, lilies, mimosa, peach, cistus, rare flowering shrubs, they were happy here. The place was full of perfume. Lucky devil—this Tryte. Fife and drum! Yes, John Maxwell was rather fond of beating the drum. Yet, he was a likeable person, in spite of his posings and his laughing cynicism. Little men have to wear their complacency with care. Captain Samson, the self-constituted martinet, found contrasts in Tryte's unbuttoned hedonism that were provocative when the world was too full of strenuous old women. He liked the fellow, though he may have thought his philosophy of life dangerous trash.

Captain Valentine Samson, who also had a sharp and witty tongue which had not helped him in the "Service," turned aside to inspect one of Tryte's particular extravagances. Tryte had said—"What, no grass. I—will—have grass. God's own green-horn shall have grass." And here it was, a little green plateau

that had been an olive grove, and still was such, save that it was spread with a lush green carpet. And very lovely it was, restful to the eye, under the grey flicker of the olive trees. Captain Samson saw a long black snake trailed across the grass, a hose, with a large "Sprinkler" at the end of it. The sprinkler was working, throwing revolving plumes of water which broke into myriads of flashing drops. Very pleasant to watch, but damned extravagant.

"I wonder what that costs him?"

There was a flash too in the sailor's eyes, but not of envy. He had very dark eyes that could flash. Well, well, a fellow who both wrote and painted and was very much the vogue, could afford to lay a green carpet even in the desert.

Captain Samson, returning to the main path, mounted the quarter-deck of the terrace, and saw that colourful figure in the long chair. Tryte's trousers were green corduroys and baggy at that, his pull-over the colour of a lemon; he wore sandals and a beard, a little pointed blond beard, and it suited him. Spanish Grandee and Intellectual Goat! Tryte was on the fat side, and his face had breadth and a certain dignity, and his very blue eyes could fool you with innocence.

"Hullo, Admiral! Good man, come and drink."

Samson's face gave a little shimmer of a smile. He had taught himself to eschew drinks, partly because he could not afford them, and would not drink at other men's expense. He walked deliberately on his long, straight legs towards Tryte's chair, and sat down with a suggestion of stately stiffness.

"Not blocking the flow of inspiration, I hope?"

Tryte had rolled up and was poised sideways on the chair.

"No, sir. I'm as empty as —. But—how vulgar!"

Samson looked at him with that same little shimmer of a smile.

"You can't shock the Navy."

"Can't I?"

"No, but you have tried."

Tryte chuckled. If he was afraid of anyone he was a little afraid of this taut, clear-cut sailor, with his priest's mouth, and his seaman's eyes.

"Tell me, didn't you ever talk smut?"

"Not in my Mess."

"Quite right. Silly stuff shere smut. Change your mind, old man. Even the carnations are doing it."

Samson looked at the flowers. He did not like carnations, but this piece of puckishness seemed rather hard on the flowers.

"You're as mischievous as a monkey, Tryte."

"Oh, my dear chap, my dear chap! Must have my bit of fun. Here, look at that. I want a caption for it."

He reached for the black and white drawing, and passed it to the sailor. It showed a hairy and hilarious gentleman very much in the nude, brandishing a goblet, and shouting something, probably obscene. Captain Samson considered it, his head erect, lips compressed. This thing was John Maxwell Tryte at his naughtiest, for Samson chose to regard much of Tryte's ebullience as naughtiness. The fellow was a Play Boy.

"The gentleman appears to be enjoying himself."

"I want a caption for it."

Captain Samson removed his hat and laid it gently on his knees. Even hats had to be treated with care and circumspection, for he had a derelict sister who had to be assisted. So, Tryte wanted a title for this effort. But, surely, the author of "Persiflage in Paris"—and "Legitimate Hate" should need no prompting? Clever devil, both on canvas and in print. Rather unusual for a man to be it in two separate crafts. Captain Samson had inspected Tryte's last picture show at the Gretna Galleries, and had come away wondering whether modern art was just mad or bad.

"Seems to me," he began.

But Tryte had kicked out his sandalled feet.

"I've got it. It is better to die of drink than of boredom."

Valentine Samson looked at him sharply, and then reached out and laid the cartoon on the table. His face had taken on a sudden sternness. A man can be challenged in his more secret sincerities, even by a Play Boy.

"Think so, Tryte?"

Tryte was grinning. Samson had his battle-face on, and Tryte had an unconfessed respect for that face. After all, complete

integrity was a rare virtue, particularly so in Tryte's experience.

"Ever been badly bored, sir?"

"Have I not. Look here, Tryte. I'll tell you something. I once broke up my bed."

"With a girl, sir?"

"No—because of what a wench had given me. I was in hospital and the cure lingered."

Tryte stared. Samson, looking straight at him, remarked to himself on the whiteness of Tryte's eyeballs, brilliantly contrasted with the blue of the iris. They were not the eyes of a man who would be tough in tight places. Silly women spoke of those eyes as "Magnetic."

"My dear chap, you——"

"Shut up for a moment. I may have been a young fool, but if ever a man was bored with his own disgust——"

Tryte sat still, looking suddenly boyish.

"I say, I—er—feel rather proud of your telling me this, sir. I'm not a mere gabbling idiot. I——"

Samson looked straight at him.

"Ever been frightened, Tryte, badly frightened?"

"Well, no—I can't remember——"

"Does a man good sometimes. Lose your grip, and you realize—that you have got to get that grip back, or become like the fellow in your picture."

Tryte sat gazing at him with that rather likeable boyishness. Then he turned, picked up the cartoon and tore it in half.

"How's that, sir?"

Samson's smile answered him.

"You can do better."

II

IN the old days St. Martin had been known as San Martino, and its perfumes had been those of fish, lemons and olive oil and the incense of its white towered church. San Martino had been religious, and had kept its fiestas, and seen to it that its olive trees and its fishing-boats had been blessed in the name of the saint. It had been very full of children and little wine-shops, and sometimes it had emptied its slops out of the windows. San Martino would hardly have known St. Martin, since the French had capitalized it, and made it hygienic and cunningly commercial. St. Martin had a casino, public gardens, tennis courts, a bathing-pool lined with blue tiles, a promenade, sumptuous shops. It was ready to sell you anything in a polite and coldly civilized way. It would sell you its virtue, but not blatantly so. It was not interested in your morals, but solely in your capacity to pay. The church of St. Martin still loomed over the huddled roofs of the old town like some ecclesiastical ghost. It rang its bells, but few people paid very much attention to them. The casino had ousted the church.

Maxwell Tryte had taken an immediate fancy to St. Martin. It suited your undressed moods, when you sprawled on the sand of its bathing beach by moonlight with something whose nudity of body and spirit asked to be caressed or tickled. It could be everything to everybody. If it chose to be respectable and attend the English church, well, that too provided you with contrasts. You could picture the parson's wife in red pyjamas dancing the can-can by moonlight on a bottle of champagne.

It had been said of him that Tryte had no reverence in his make-up. He had remained the impudent boy. Success had come to him too easily, and like a compliant and doting woman was every ready to run for celebrity's slippers. It had been quite an amazing success both on canvas and the printed page, for Maxwell Tryte's pictures were the fashion, and his books sold all over the world. If he attended a function, he was one of those golden creatures whose picture appeared inevitably in the social

journals. "Mr. Maxwell Tryte dining with Lady So-and-So," or "Mr. Maxwell Tryte dancing with the Countess Katinsky." If he gave a cocktail party in his astonishing London flat, all the people who gabbled and drank were people who mattered.

There is truth in the saying that a too successful man has no friends. Hangers-on and fawners may spawn about him, and raise a chorus. "Max, you're marvellous." Tryte thought so too, and with a boyish cheerfulness that spread its fingers cockily at critics. What did those poor, penurious hacks matter to him? They had created nothing. They would never create anything, but just stink in print like fox or badger. The envious might call him a corruscating cad, but Maxwell Tryte had taken success like warm wine into his belly. He had grown fat and jocular and even more colourful on it, a good fellow to his flatterers, ready with his spare cash, and he had that in plenty. He could echo the saying—"Fate cannot touch me. I have dined to-day." All luxuries, in and out of season, were his.

Two men, so different, having parted, were moved to look back in thought upon each other.

Captain Valentine Samson had gone off by way of the hill path and gate above the villa, and taken a trackway that climbed through the woods to the old Signal Station, and here the sailor found something significant to watch. The plateau upon which the white town stood commanded—above the green sea of pine-tops—a view of St. Martin's Bay. Italy lay hazed in the distance. Four light grey shapes were sliding in over the sea, four French cruisers moving in line astern. The sailor's dark eyes gleamed. He stood to watch the ships as they steamed into the blue bay. They were a pretty sight, but Samson's eyes were critical. He saw them turn about and go westwards, but in the turning the hindmost cruiser had lost distance. She had appeared to wallow and sag to one side, and a little smile tinged those tight lips. Spacing, which should have been perfect, had been broken. Slackness—somewhere. And Captain Valentine Samson, English of the English, knew what he would have said had he been the senior officer in command of those cruisers. Flags would have shot up, or the wireless crackled. Yes, you had to be

smart on your helm, keep your speed and your distance. A fellow like Tryte had too much stern, and too little rudder. A likeable chap, in spite of his clothes and his jabber. But his pictures! Ye Gods! Had England gone like that? Was it a symbol?

Captain Samson wandered down a trackway, and sighting a sunny spot amid the heather, sat down at the foot of a tree, and pulled out a pipe. It was of the bulldog breed, and he contemplated it, and rubbed the polished bowl in the palm of a strong hand. Well, he was an old fellow, and he could suppose—somewhat out of date. He believed in discipline, as much for yourself as for the other fellow. Yes, perhaps more so. If you were in charge of men you had to be believed in, trusted, even be spoken of as “Old Sam.” The trouble with a fellow like Tryte was that he had no discipline, wobbled about on the edge of impulse, behaved like a child, stuck carnations into liquor, drew ribald portraits of most unpleasant people. Yet, Tryte had torn that cartoon in half. Hope for a fellow who could do that.

How old was he? About thirty-seven? What would Tryte be at fifty? Fat and cynical and a little smeary, silly about women, over-dressed, flabby? Not a happy picture. In Captain Samson’s experience a man’s testing time came in the furious forties when he began chasing his own vanishing youth. You either whipped yourself into wisdom, or became a rudderless mess, or a sort of passionate pirate ready to make your inner decencies walk the plank.

Captain Samson had filled and lit his pipe when a surprising and most unexpected thing happened. He heard the crack of a rifle shot down the hill on his left, and a bullet whined past him with uncomfortable closeness. What the devil? A second shot snapped out, and the bullet struck a tree just beyond him. Was someone mistaking him for a rabbit? But there were no wild conies in these parts, and Captain Samson, stimulated by natural indignation, got up on his long, taut legs, and stepped out into the trackway. Down yonder between the trees he saw a lad with a miniature rifle preparing for a third shot at a wine bottle posed in the middle of the path.

The sailor hailed him.

“Hullo, there—you stop that.”

The lad lowered his rifle as Samson came swinging down to him. He was a fat and pasty-faced youth, and obviously French, the kind of solitary son French parents produced. And then Samson saw the parents. Madame was sitting on a camp-stool, sewing; Monsieur splurged in a deck-chair, reading the daily paper. A car was parked a few yards away.

Captain Samson raised his hat. He happened to speak passable French.

"Pardon me, monsieur, but do you permit your son to shoot as he pleases in a public place?"

Monsieur was fat, swarthy and bearded, a complacent bundle of a man. He wore pince-nez, and his hands were dirty. He made some sort of contemptuous noise, and shrugged. This was France, and the French did what they pleased in their own country. Moreover, there was no danger save to foreigners who walked unnecessarily in unfrequented places.

Captain Samson was silent for a moment. Madame went on sewing. The boy took another shot at the bottle and missed it by yards. To a man who had been taught manners, and sportsmanship and consideration for others, this callous and arrogant rudeness was somehow incredible.

"Permit me to ask, monsieur, what would have happened if your son had shot me?"

Again, the Frenchman shrugged and rustled his paper.

"Monsieur should keep to the promenade. This is our country. It is not—England."

The sailor's eyes were glittering.

"Thank God for that, monsieur. We have some good manners left in England."

"Bah!" said the Frenchman.

"And bah to you, monsieur," said Samson. "If ever you have another war, and you breed up your boys like this—you won't be able to face the Germans."

The Frenchman jerked his head so vigorously that his pince-nez fell off.

"How dare you insult my country? Permit me to tell you, monsieur——"

Samson cut him short.

"I presume that is your car. I shall take it's number and report you to the police."

"Bah, they are our police."

"Then you can keep them and your politicians, monsieur. Good day to you."

He smiled that little shimmery smile of his and walked on towards the car, and while he was jotting down his details in the note-book that he always carried, the boy took another crack at the bottle.

"If that is France," thought the sailor, "where will she be when the Boche goes for her next time. And where shall we be if England is Maxwell Tryte?"

Tryte was strolling up and down the terrace. He had rescued the carnations from their pink drink, though—for the moment—they appeared none the worse for it. The flowers had been gathered for "Rosalie." Tryte had a date that evening with "Rosalie" at a Bal Fleuri at the Casino, but Maxwell Tryte was just a little fed up with "Rosalie." She had "Teeth," and had shown pique when Tryte had suggested dentistry.

Should he cut the Casino? But that would be rather churlish, for though Maxwell Tryte behaved like a spoilt and irresponsible boy he had an amiable weakness for pleasing people. Yet, why this mood? Something seemed to have disagreed with his spiritual stomach, if he had so tenuous an organ. The sailor man? No, not Samson in the flesh, but something Captain Valentine Samson stood for and expressed, something which he—Maxwell Tryte—lacked. Oh, yes, he was no fool about himself. There were moments, and this was one of them, when he knew Maxwell Tryte to be a flabby hedonist.

Loafing out into the garden he came to the olive grove where the sprinkler was drenching the green grass. Roberto had just pulled the machine into a new position, and Tryte lounged against an olive tree and watched the sprinkler at work. Quite an aesthetic show. The arms went round and round, and the plumes of water fell in graceful curves. Yes, just like life. Everything went round and round. Eternal sameness. You got up in the morning, washed, breakfasted, idled about or did some work,

went to sleep after a luxurious lunch, drank tea, alone or with visitors, talked, strolled down to the casino, lost a little money, came back to drinks and a luxurious dinner. The day glittered like those plumes of water. It was endless repetition. And was it just fancy, or was his work growing a little thin, and lacking that gaillard impulsiveness which had bubbled up and out with effortless ease? And supposing the fountain dried up, or the world ceased to regard him as an entertaining person? Vogues came and vogues went. He had saved some money, and squandered more.

Damn it—the sailor man must have infected him with the bug of self-analysis. Why analyse anything? The show was just a show, silly and splendid and eternally incalculable. Men like Samson suffered from moral biliousness. He—Tryte—would keep his date with “Rosalie,” and give her so much champagne that she would smell of it, and he would go home with her and forget any oral aroma in her very provocative French sex-craft.

Tryte’s depressed mood was not of long duration. The afternoon’s post brought him in a copy of an American journal in which he and his work were boosted and not without tact and comprehension. Tryte was pleased, for who is not pleased by praise, even when the garland is made of perpetual roses. An understanding and knowledgable article this. “Maxwell Tryte’s work is of peculiar significance. It indicates—as with a broad bold sweep of the brush, the tendencies of the world’s new search for self expression.” A nice, resounding sentence—that! He—was significant, yes, sir! He felt like sending the magazine to old Grymes who had crabbed his last show.

Assuredly, Rosalie and the Bal Masque were indicated.

The Show was the thing, and the art of showmanship, and escape from the illusion that anything seriously mattered. God and all that! Poor old Samson suffered from the belief that a sort of Supreme Admiral walked the quarter-deck, and that a dirty hand-rail or a badly-coiled rope were offences against the Deity. Not that certain decencies should not be considered. A fellow should cultivate fastidiousness—even in his hedonism. And the world was growing quite a decent sort of place with

vain and amiable fools like Ramsay Macdonald deputising for God. Dustmen cleaned their teeth; little wenches cultivated neat legs and complexions.

But Maxwell Tryte was consistent in caring for his appearance. He had quite a good appearance, and his mirror pleased him. He gave his little blond beard proper attention, and tied his white tie with just that touch of abandonment that gave it personality. His coat was a little tight in the waist, his white waistcoat a little too brilliant as to buttons, and the stripes down his trousers a little too broad. Other men might call him that Bohemian Bounder, but jealousy was not the prerogative of the fair sex.

Tryte's French taximan picked him up at eight-thirty. The Bal Fleuri included dinner. Tryte was wearing a black opera cloak lined with sky-blue silk.

"Evening, François. There is a little case to travel with me. I may need it. Oh, la-la."

François grinned.

"At what hour shall I call for monsieur at the casino?"

"About midnight—I think. And you had better collect me at about eight to-morrow morning."

François understood. Monsieur Tryte might wear a white carnation in his buttonhole, but the colour of the night's adventure would be red.

Maxwell Tryte waited in the foyer. Rosalie was late; Rosalie was always late, but Tryte had matters to amuse him. People were pouring in; people stared at him, but Tryte was used to being stared at, and it pleased him. The celebrity was indicated.

"That's Maxwell Tryte."

Women might think him rather marvellous, and if some men remarked—"Nasty little bounder," well—that was part of fame, and the fate of being a person. Nor was Maxwell Tryte quite a nasty little bounder. He was much more sensitive to social impressions than he was willing to allow.

A tall man with a tremendous nose and a head of white hair came in with a girl. Sir Everard Ravenstock. He looked it. Tryte nodded at him almost condescendingly, and Sir Everard's response was curt.

"Evening, Tryte."

But Tryte was looking at the girl. Ye Gods, some creature, tall and slim and brilliantly dark, with some of the south in her skin, and a young dignity that was English. Ravenstock's daughter? Possibly. The girl, head in air, had returned Tryte's stare, but only for a moment. Her very dark eyes had been cool and appraising.

"Who's the funny little man?"

Her father chuckled.

"Maxwell Tryte. Super-celebrity."

"Tryte? I don't seem to have heard of him."

"My dear!" said her father. "What blasphemy! I thought I had had you educated. Haven't you seen a Tryte picture?"

"No."

"Well, perhaps it's as well."

Rosalie arrived, and Rosalie was not in the happiest of tempers. And why? Ask the good God. Rosalie exemplified all the temperamental vagaries that are attributed to women. She looked as though a shoe pinched, which it did, in more ways than one. Rosalie had been to see a doctor, and the doctor's verdict had been more than disturbing. Now, who was a nasty fellow? Maxwell? Not very likely, but you never knew. Rosalie was feeling like a scalded cat, ready to spit and claw, and her dark eyes had no caressing smiles for her gallant. She was wearing a dramatic, flame coloured dress, and her thin lips were almost of the same colour.

"Well, well, well," said Maxwell Tryte, "here we are at last."

Rosalie's eyes snapped a brittle gleam at him.

"I want a drink. Haven't you been to the vestiare?"

Tryte's blue lined cloak was folded over his arm.

"Obviously no. I go. Stand and be gazed at. The frock deserves it."

She gave a little flick of the head.

"I go to the American Bar."

Tryte grinned at her, which was not tactful.

"Do, my dear. Order me a White Lady, or a red one. I will deposit this garment."

She turned away from him, and her neck looked tense and thin. Oh, la—la! Now, what was the matter with the minion? Anything could be the matter with a woman like Rosalie.

The American Bar was a parrot house, and the birds seemed to be perched three deep at the counter. Rosalie sailed in, looked and was looked at. Not a niche, not a table anywhere, but Rosalie pushed in. "Excuse me, monsieur," and they excused her. She had a voice that could rip like rending silk. It had no dulcet coo this evening.

"One White Lady—and one Special, Marcelle."

Marcelle knew his Rosalie.

"Bien, madame."

He was shaking vigorously, and Rosalie had lit a cigarette when Tryte made his entry. He smiled at the whole Bar, but the Bar did not smile back at him. Nor, for the moment could he see Rosalie wedged in, but with elbows out, and ready for a row with anybody.

She saw him and raised her bag aloft.

"Max."

"Oh—there you are. Bit of a crowd."

The mob had made way for Rosalie, but it did not make way for Max. Rosalie had to pass him his drink, and she also passed remarks.

"These—gentlemen—are not considerate. I had to push. The politesse is absent."

Her black eyes cast brittle glances right and left, and her neighbours avoided the challenge. Nor did anyone offer to vacate a stool.

Tryte played for peace.

"Come hither, little one. Let us drink at leisure—at our table. Marcelle——"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Charge it to me. I'll see you later."

The dance-floor was surrounded by scores of tables, all garnished with flowers, and upon Tryte's table were red roses. Already dinner was being served, and the orchestra was gathering upon its dais. Tryte led the way, glass in one hand, a cigarette in the other, with Rosalie following like some peevish Medusa,

for her black hair had received too much attention and her head looked like a nest of little snakes. It was to be a crowded evening, and the tables were set close together, and Tryte's was on the edge of the dance floor. Not till he had reached it and was drawing Rosalie's chair back for her did he realize that the table on the right was occupied by Sir Everard Ravenstock and his daughter. Tryte was conscious of two pairs of eyes scanning him and his partner for one split second. Sir Everard's very blue eyes had a cold and concentrated glare. The girl's were more interested, as though some measure of innocence was hers even in these undressed days. What a queer couple, but the lady's frock was a very exquisite production, if a little lurid.

Embarrassment was rare with Maxwell Tryte. Maybe he did not care a damn for Sir Everard's disapproval, but somehow the girl was different. Innocence—pooh! Who was innocent in this period of universal shrugging of shoulders? But he did feel that he was being scrutinized by the dark eyes of a wild naiad who had emerged suddenly from some leafy glade. Her gaze had the strange quality of making him feel naked.

A rather difficult situation! Sir Everard gave him one casual nod, a nod that dismissed their contiguity, and then proceeded to ignore them. Rosalie had sat down with the pronounced frou-frou of a woman in the throes of temperament. Her chair creaked. It happened to be a decrepit chair.

"Psst," said she, "it is intolerable—an insult. Garçon, the—Chief——"

Max eyed her whimsically. She had hissed, and all her snaky hair was rampant. Did he really propose to enjoy a night of——?

"What is it, Cherrie?"

"The chair! It is unsafe."

A very suave gentleman with a face like a cake of pale soap hurried up and addressed himself to Tryte.

"What is it, Monsieur Tryte? Does not the table——?"

"It is the chair, Monsieur Charles, the lady's chair."

"Tien! You call it a chair. Another, at once."

"Certainly, madame."

Monsieur Charles's politeness was slightly ironic.

"Jules, another chair for madame."

"Rosalie" might be one of St. Martin's particular products, but Maxwell Tryte was a man of fame and of ready cash.

The chair was changed and Rosalie sat on the new one and attended irritably to her complexion. Tryte was considering the menu. The wine-waiter stood by with the wine-list. Champagne—of course. It looked like being an enjoyable evening! Champagne might ease Rosalie's creaking temperamental corsage.

Meanwhile, the girl at the next table watched the strange couple with dark and serious eyes. They were of another world, not her world of horses and country things, woods and meadows, tennis, and simple flowery frocks. She was in the midst of ingenuous reflections when her father spoke.

"Rowena, soup or hors d'oeuvres?"

Maxwell Tryte, considering champagne, caught the sound and was intrigued by it. Rowena! Rowena Ravenstock. Charming but Gilbertian alliteration. Shades of Walter Scott! Did Rowenas exist in these petroleum days? He glanced at the girl, and Rosalie observed that look. To a woman of the profession it was significant and almost insulting.

"Max."

Her voice clawed at him.

"Yes, Rosy."

"I am hungry. Please attend——"

"I do. Bollinger twenty-nine. A bottle. Soup or——"

"I do not feel like potage."

"Of course not—my dear. Hors d'oeuvres. Supposing you do the ordering, Rosy."

She snatched the menu from him.

"Tch, you have no stomach. Ros bif—all over."

And for some reason Sir Everard chuckled. It appeared that the gay life could be too corruscatingly gay.

The orchestra played. People got up from tables and danced. Sir Everard danced with his daughter, and they danced very well in the smooth English way. Maxwell Tryte watched them, and Rosalie watched Max.

So, Max was admiring la jeune fille. Well, really, or oh-la-la!

Fool of a man. She pushed her plate away, and aggressively so.
"I wish to dance."

Max came back to reality, but the idiot had a kind of dreamy-boy look in his eyes.

"But—of course."

He stood up, and pulled down his white waistcoat. Imperceptibly he was developing a little paunch. They danced, and when Rosalie danced she expected her partner and the whole room to be conscious of her splendid movements, for Rosalie could hold the floor. She carried her snake's head slightly retracted, and her undulating hips were French, but Tryte's mood seemed to be that of a little wooden soldier, stilted and mechanical. He did not look into his partner's face. His eyes roved elsewhere.

"Imbecile," said she.

"Pardon?"

His sudden smirk was self-conscious.

"She—attracts you, the English vache. Pay attention. I—am dancing."

Tryte laughed.

"Innocence—makes no appeal to you, my pet."

Her nostrils dilated.

"Innocence. Imbecile. All men are imbeciles after forty."

"Then I am not yet imbecile."

"No? No young girls are innocent, Monsieur Max, save to silly old men. They learn everything at school—in the bedrooms——"

And suddenly Maxwell Tryte's temper grew flushed.

"Oh, shut up, Rosalie. Come and drink some more champagne. What's the matter with you to-night?"

"Matter? Nothing is ever the matter with me. You dance like an elephant and you gape all over the room. Let us sit. I waste my—excellence."

"Indeed you do," said he, "we'll sit."

It was not a happy evening, but happier for Maxwell Tryte than he knew, for, at the impossible hour of half past eleven Rosalie announced that she had a headache and was going home.

When Rosalie had a headache the stars stopped in their courses. Max had a car called for her, and saw her into it, and there the night's adventure seemed halted. His little suitcase would travel back with him to the Villa Violet, and certain perils that he knew not of be averted from his head.

He returned to his table, ordered a whisky and soda, and lit a cigar, while poor Rosalie undressed in a rage of tears, and tore her precious frock in the process, for, even a professional lady may have feelings about things, the way men look at other women, and the unpleasant discoveries doctors can make. The Ravenstocks were still at their table. Young men were scarce, and Maxwell Tryte was moved to wonder whether he dare ask the girl to dance. Dare? Did not the great Max confer an honour when he bowed before a prospective partner?

He laid his cigar aside. He stood up. He addressed himself to Sir Everard.

"May I have the pleasure, sir, of dancing with your daughter?"

Sir Everard gave him a blue stare.

"Well, ask her."

Tryte produced his celebrated smile.

"May I have the honour?"

She looked him straight in the face.

"I'm not dancing any more to-night—thank you."

III

CAPTAIN VALENTINE SAMSON never entered the Casino, but often he was to be seen sitting in its gardens in the shade of an ilex or an olive. He was there on a particular morning with a note-book on his knee, scribbling down figures, for Captain Samson had an urge, and finance entered largely into the problem. Like many sailor-men who have lost their sea he

had a desire to own a cottage and a few acres of land, and run a chicken-farm or grow fruit. The old Roman in him reverted to the soil. His tastes might be simple, but they had the subtlety of a shrewd simplicity. If the fruits of the earth entered your belly, other and more mystical fruits satisfied your soul.

Sir Everard Ravenstock, strolling down through the gardens, saw his friend upon the seat, and smiled.

"Hullo, Sam."

"Hullo, old man."

Sir Everard was much less obvious than he looked. If he had a prodigious nose, it was a symbol of sagacity. A fellow might not want to be disturbed when he had a notebook on his knee, but the sailor's face was welcoming.

Sir Everard sat down. There are different ways of sitting down, and even so simple an act can be significant. Sir Everard did not slump on to the seat or apply his backside to it with irreverent gusto. There can be unconscious dignity, even in sitting, and Sir Everard might have been settling himself on a sunny bank to watch the wind playing amid the grasses.

"Had enough of hotels."

His conversation was abrupt and conservative. A few short words sufficed. According to the great Max, Ravenstock belonged to the 'untin' and shootin' world that cut its beginnings and endings, called everyone Eddie, or Freddie, or Squidgy, and whose ideas were as bald as its language.

"Off soon—then," said the sailor.

"Next week. Looking forward to the fishing. Coming too?"

Samson looked vaguely sad.

"Not yet. Economizing. And what to?"

Sir Everard frowned.

"Yes, rotten business being retired. May want you again. A little cad like Hitler's bound to spill the beans. Meanwhile——"

Samson gave a jerk of the head.

"Too much meanwhile. Like to use myself on something."

"Got any ideas?"

"Fruit or fowls."

"Chickens? Oh—my dear chap! Stupidest things on earth. Pure drudgery. But fruit——"

"Question of capital. Have to plant and wait. And late frosts playing old Harry with you. And the middle-man——"

"Hold on," said Sir Everard. "Got an idea."

It appeared that a neighbour of Sir Everard's, the owner of a small fruit-farm was selling out and getting out, having been cured of a ridiculous illusion by the English weather, and the English public's passion for tinned apricots, oranges and bananas.

"Not the sort of fellow to stick it, Sam. Sort of fellow who comes out of London and is more country than the country, knowing damn all about the real thing. And wore sandals, sandals in good old Anderida mind. Two winters and a May frost did him in."

"Oh, that sort of twerp," said Samson. "Place any good?"

"Quite. Nice patch of loam. Good wind-break. Up a bit. Small Jacobean house. Spent quite a lot of money on it."

"What did he plant?"

"Cox's, and Lanes, and a newish thing called Monarch. And black currants, and logans. Trees three year olds, some Number Nine stock. The ass hadn't the guts to hang on and wait."

"Pretty stiff price—I suppose?"

"No. Got an idea. Thought of buying. Why shouldn't I? Let to you, or sell on a mortgage. Like you as a neighbour."

They exchanged grins of affection.

"It's an idea. Neighbourly feeling reciprocated. Where could one market one's stuff?"

"Why not work up a private connection? Cut out middle-man's or agent's profits."

"You seem full of ideas, old man."

Sir Everard sat and poked at the ground with his stick. He belonged to that ancient world which persisted in carrying sticks.

"I've got a nose, Sam."

The sailor chuckled.

"No, don't laugh. I was born with this boko. Ancestral, and all that. Got a sense of smell. I'll bet you what you like there'll be a war within five years."

"Germany again?"

"Of course. Look at what's leading them, the swine. And you

know where we shall be; where we always are. I don't like the face of the future. No, not a bit."

"But my dear chap, I should——"

"Wait a jiffy. The Hun will have everything planned this time. Going to be damned nasty for us. We shall be in with the French, and they are a pretty rotten crowd. Starvation for our damned silly old country. No bananas. Really, Stanley B. ought to think about bananas. And where would you be? A fruit-merchant. Pretty good business, and a pretty good job. Useful job—too."

"But—old man——"

"Yes, I know what you are going to say. You'd ask for re-employment. Yes, and what could they give you? We've been left as the Germans put it—with a lot of old barges. No ships for you, my lad, not for years. Might make you captain of the *Clacton Bell* or something. Meanwhile—you would have got fruit. You'd be doing a damned good job. Well, that's how I see it, Sam. You might even sell fruit to that damned little squirt of a Maxwell Tryte."

"Why—Maxwell Tryte?"

"Didn't you know he's a new neighbour of mine? Bought 'Stallards' last autumn. Tried to dance with Rowena last night, and she turned him down. Ha-ha!"

Captain Valentine Samson looked thoughtful, as though he were making some complicated nautical calculation, but it was not a bitter thoughtfulness. His lean, black and white face had a tinge of humour. Here was a playboy like Tryte with a villa on the Riviera, a flat in town, and a country place on the Sussex-Surrey border, while he, who had served his country for some forty years, could scarcely afford to buy ten acres of land and a cottage.

"Not a bad chap—Tryte, when you know more of him."

"Don't want to, Sam. Can't stomach the fellow."

"He's not our world."

"By Jove, no. Useful product to put up against the Boche. That sort disappeared into Spain in our show. Suppose in the next one they'll crowd to America and lecture on 'What We Are Fighting For.'"

"So—Rowena turned him down."

"She did. Bit of a slap in the face. Believe he was shocked and astonished."

"Probably. Might do him good. You know, my friend, life might yet play Rowena to a man like Tryte."

Maxwell Tryte breakfasted in bed.

It was not that he had drunk too much, or danced too much, or wearied himself in any way, or suffered qualms over Rosalie's tempestuous departure. In fact he had returned to the Villa Violet at what was for him an early hour, taken two aspirins and a whisky, and gone to bed.

What an aspirin age was this! One of Germany's principal exports, and how suggestive! Maybe Germany's evil little Sage had diagnosed the world's state of hysteria, and proposed to drug his neighbours until he was ready to hit them over the head. Decadent democracies. Nor was the little Beast wholly wrong in his diagnosis. Safety First, and Stanley B., aspirin and radios for everybody.

Tryte sat in bed wearing sky blue silk pyjamas, and a saffron silk dressing-gown. Denise had brought him his breakfast, and Denise was young and comely. Had he a headache? He was not quite sure. Anyway—why not two more aspirins.

"Denise, ma petite, the aspirin bottle. It is on the dressing-table."

Denise had brought it to him, but without any air of being interested either in his headache or his manhood.

Maxwell Tryte ate eggs and bacon without pleasure, and meditated, also without pleasure.

He had made an ass of himself on the previous night.

Yes, palpably so. To dine with a Rosalie and then ask a Rowena to dance with him!

Had he had too much champagne, or too much Rosalie, or too much Maxwell Tryte? Did a celebrated person, and genius come to presume too much upon its godliness. He, the great Max, had been snubbed by a flapper.

But what a flapper! Oenone, and Cassandra, and Iseult all dressed up in English innocence. Innocence! No woman or girl

was innocent. So, he might assume that a dark young Dignity had just not liked the look of him. Was it incipient tummy? Or had it been Rosalie? Well, to ask a girl to dance after dining with a distinguished tart wasn't exactly in the proper taste. He had been an ass.

He had presumed too much upon being "Max."

His bedroom window enclosed the blue of the sea above the pine-tops. The smell of Mimosa was in the air. St. Martin had stunk of Mimosa now for weeks and it could become a cloying, stuffy smell, and the pollen gave you asthma. But surely—"Stink" was not the polite work to apply to the fragrant Wattle? Tryte found cherry jam upon his breakfast tray. Damn it, he did not like cherry jam. Why not good old marmalade? In the days of a penurious youth he had gorged himself on marmalade.

And what of the day? What was he going to do with it? He was not particularly conscious of wanting to do anything. It was not necessary for him to do anything save dress himself and masticate his food. What of the new book? Somehow, he was feeling rather bored with the new book; it seemed to lack bounce and devil.

Maxwell Tryte rose at his leisure. He strolled into his studio, and after looking at himself in a Venetian mirror, became piqued by the idea of making a study of himself. He did so, in that swift, desultory, yet mordant way of his. The craftsman in him, profoundly puckish, and somehow other than himself, produced a cartoon that was Tryte by some sardonic other Tryte. Completed, it shocked him, for his craftsmanship had portrayed a little, fat and rather smeary fellow with a bulging belly, satyr's eyes, and a yellow grin.

Good Lord, what funny tricks your inner self could play with you! Nasty tricks. Tryte fondled his blond beard, and with an air of surreptitious distaste, turned the damned thing's face to the wall.

IV

MAXWELL TRYTE indulged in a form of recreation that was rare for him. He walked. Maybe the inspiration was various, a secret revolt against flabbiness, a concession to ennui so far as his work was concerned, and a desire to get a glimpse of a certain person. The Plage was sufficiently good for him, and postulated no hills. Moreover, the Plage might be more likely to put him into contact with a young woman who appeared unappreciative of genius.

Astonishing transformation! Max had descended to a lounge suit, and a conventional collar and tie. If he proposed to paint a young person's portrait, and to solicit and confer favours, his self-deception was really very ingenuous. Perfect morning, perfect peace, a sea like watered silk, the sky's blue of an indescribable innocence. He would walk as far as the Red Rocks, and allow himself an aperitif at the Café Rouge. Three hundred yards short of the Casino and the "Blue Lagoon" he met Augustus Purcell of the Wig and Lyre. He wore the first, and in fancy played the other. Augustus Purcell was also of the fraternity of freaks. His walk was undulating and lyrical, his round and baby face an infant melody.

"Dear Max, why this thusness?"

He poked a plump finger into Tryte's respectable waistcoat.

"Why—what?"

"Savile Row and Old School Tie?"

Tryte was not feeling like Purcell and counterpoint. The fellow was always too felicitously facetious.

"Going to lunch with St. Barnabas?"

"No, I'm going to the devil."

And Tryte passed on.

His next confrontation was with a quite different person. Valentine Samson walking the Plage as on a quarter deck. There appeared to be purpose in his parade, a certain fire and eagerness

in his eyes. Tryte had always subscribed to the pretty saying that the eyes of the Navy suggested the eyes of a man gazing at sea-horizons, but that actually their blue vacuousness was due to a plethora of untaxed drink.

"Morning, Tryte."

"Eight bells—to you, sir, or whatever it may be."

Samson's eyes looked him over. Was Tryte dressed and in his right mind? Neither to die of drink nor of boredom!

"Official occasion. Want a walk?"

"Why and whither, sir?"

"The *Charybdis* and the *Chloe* are in Villefort Bay. Going to see an old friend. Was a snotty under me."

"Oh, the Navy."

"That's it. Have all the lads ashore."

"Damn the Navy," thought Tryte, excused himself, and passed on.

Now, why should the coming of the Boys in Blue fill him with a vague feeling of resentment? Surely he should be proud of the Senior Service? Maxwell Tryte stared at the Red Rocks towards which he was moving, but he shirked the honest exploring of his unwelcoming mood. Was it that his Genius was offended by lusty lads crowding upon a stage that he rather considered to be his? Good and reliable institution—the Navy, but lacking in subtlety and aesthetics, and quite incapable of appreciating an "Art." Maybe he was conscious in his secret soul of the fact that a German Lieutenant might look at him askance as at a clown or some absurd, performing animal. And the Snotties? Irreverent young brutes who might nickname him "Butter and Squish." No, Maxwell Tryte was not pleased.

And then, almost inadvertently, he ran into the Young Dignity of Youth. She came sailing on her long slim legs from a passage shaded with palms. She crossed the road a little way ahead of him, and the confrontation was inevitable. Tryte raised his Homburg hat. A ridiculous thing to wear, and as a rule he only travelled in it.

"Good morning, Miss Ravenstock."

Head in air she gave him a half startled, blank glance, and her young face was as cold as Galatea's when Galatea was marble.

“Good morning.”

She would have swept past him, but he paused, and stood hat in hand.

“Excuse me, may I ask a favour?”

She was silent—waiting.

“You may know that I sometimes paint portraits—if the subject intrigues me. Would you permit me to paint yours?”

Her dark and destructive eyes were on him.

“Paint me——?”

“Yes. For—my next show. I should call it a presentation piece.”

Her unblinking, steadfast stare was moon-bright.

“Thanks. I couldn’t sit still. I don’t even like being photographed——”

“But my dear young lady——”

His dear young lady—indeed! Superfluous ass! She gave him a cursory, faint smile and a shake of the head, and left him as she might have left some itinerant cameraman touting for custom on Torquay parade.

Yes, the Navy had arrived, and elderly gentlemen who had been masquerading as youth found themselves left with the slippers. Jack was ashore, and very much so, hiring the local cabs and taxis or careering on bikes, or sitting outside cafés. The good ladies of the English community, with the consent of the chaplain, turned the small church-hall into a club for the dear boys. Tea and cigarettes, books and papers. The dear boys must be given a home from home, and be protected from those dreadful women who were so ready to welcome the Navy. Strange, how the good ladies suffer from the superstition that lusty youth can be satisfied with tea and buns. Wine, women and song. Oh, no, the dear boys should be reminded of their mothers and sisters.

Captain Valentine Samson, consulted on the subject, stood with compressed lips, and a mordant gleam in his sometimes irreverent eyes. Did not the good ladies know that men were men and that petticoats are not babies’ diapers? What should he say? Well, nothing. Let the tea and buns be spread. You cannot

make man celibate by giving him the *Church Times* to read.

"Oh, Captain Samson, perhaps you would come and say a few words to the dear lads?"

Samson looked more than coy.

"I'm afraid I'm not a platform man. Besides, you know, the men don't always want to be officered."

"But—in your private capacity."

"I have no capacity—for—what shall we call it—doing the goody-goody."

"Oh, Captain Samson!"

"Well, dear lady, to be honest—lads on shore-leave like to be let alone."

Did he not remember his own strenuous youth, and the sharp anguish of sex when you were cooped up for weeks in grim celibacy. The flick of a skirt, the curve of a pretty cheek, a pair of caressing eyes were apt to send you crazy. Well, all that was long past, and the one woman he had wanted to mate with had married a brisk and pushing politician, but he had not lost his feeling for youth, though a calm austerity had descended upon him.

Men must be men; therefore issue prophylactics and advise precautions. How shocking, and how sensible! What did the dear good ladies know of Singapore or Port Said?

For the officers of the *Charybdis* and the *Chloe*, the management of the Casino arranged a ball. Influential visitors and residents were invited to co-operate. A committee was formed, and Sir Everard Ravenstock elected chairman.

The committee issued hurried invitations, yet St. Martin's most distinguished resident was somehow forgotten or neglected.

Maxwell Tryte received no invitation.

Now, that was the sort of thing that roused Max's dander. He was like an impertinent small boy excluded from a party. Not that he had any great desire to rub shoulders with a lot of Snotties, but the challenge was obvious. He was going to that ball. Yes, sir! And let any damned baronet attempt to exclude him.

Go he did, to find the foyer full of the Navy, and all the young things for miles around. He deposited his opera hat and cloak at the vestiare. He lit a cigarette and strolled to the ballroom entrance. A formidable lady in black, and a little baby faced ex-general were on guard collecting invitation cards.

Max walked straight through between them.

"Excuse me, sir; your card."

Max spoke over his shoulder.

"I don't carry cards."

"I mean your invitation card."

"I don't receive invitations. Quite superfluous. I confer an honour by attending."

The General and the Lady looked at each other.

"Hadn't you better see Sir Everard?"

"Cheeky bounder. I will."

Sir Everard was notified, and he sought out the gate-crasher.

"Sorry, Tryte, but I must ask you for your card."

"I think you know, sir, I haven't one. I pardon the obvious error."

Sir Everard's prodigious nose appeared to gather colour.

"Look here, Mr. Tryte——"

Tryte inhaled and blew smoke from his nostrils.

"Of course, sir, if you like to throw me out, you can try it. Wouldn't exactly please the directors. I'm a shareholder. And—I spend a good deal of money——"

"I see."

"Cause some scandal, wouldn't it? After all, I confer some honour on your show. Surely I can be permitted to salute our sailors?"

Sir Everard shrugged, and the shrug said: "Oh, all right, stay here and pose and be damned to you!"

Ravenstock, in crossing to confer with other members of the committee, was waylaid by St. Martin's Mayor, wearing a sash and the button of the Legion of Honour. He was a negroid looking gentleman, with a tinge of yellow in his skin, and he might have been the brother of the eminent Monsieur Laval. The mayor spoke English with an American accent.

"Good evening, Sir Ravenstock. I am glad to see that

Monsieur Tryte does us the honour of attending. A great genius, yes, sir."

Sir Everard shook hands with the Mayor, and gobbled some obvious remark, and looking over the top of the Mayor's black head, saw his daughter standing with a tall, fair Commander beside her. They made a comely couple, and Sir Everard, having spilled a few more platitudes on the Mayor, crossed over to his daughter.

"Oh, pater, this is Commander Holroyd."

"Very glad to meet you, sir," said the sailor.

"Same to you," said Sir Everard, liking the look of the lad

His daughter was gazing at Maxwell Tryte.

"I thought he wasn't——"

"Nor was he, my dear. Distinguished gate-crasher. Took it up with him, and he flopped me. Conferring an honour by coming, and dared me to chuck him out."

"What damned cheek. Bill might oblige."

The Commander grinned.

"Bad for the Entente. He's French, isn't he?"

"No, English. Maxwell Tryte. Famous author and artist."

"Afraid I've never heard of him," said the sailor. "Looks like a prize cad-about-town."

Sir Everard stroked his nose as though to placate that sensitive and outraged organ.

"Oh, we'll let him stay. Won't get much bouquet from the Navy. Besides, he's persona grata with the locals. It would shock the Mayor."

This was one of the rare occasions when Captain Valentine Samson entered the casino. His dancing days were over, and he did not suffer from old man's feverish feet, but he could watch the lads and the lasses, these men of the ships, who, with the gallant Flying Few were to confront and confound the ultimate beastliness of the Mechanical Mind. Captain Samson stood just inside the door, leaning against a pink pilaster, and quite at his ease, though completely a wallflower. He liked watching people, especially these clean and cheerful lads, and the lasses. He did not want to chatter. Captain Valentine Samson could never decide

whether he believed in a God, but when some urgent need coerced him he behaved as God would have willed it. St. Martin symbolized a pleasant paganism, the cult of the Sun and the Vineyard and the Olive Grove. Samson was thinking of his own hypothetical English vineyard, when, between the dancing couples, he saw Maxwell Tryte posed against the opposite wall.

Another wallflower, and ironically so, and Tryte's poise was suggestive. His shoulders were set against the wall, his legs crossed, his little blond beard cocked, his eyes registering tolerant amusement. The artist was observing life and the movements of these human animals. The orchestra swayed and bumped up and down on its stools, and smirked at the dancers. Salute to God Jazz! Let negroid harmony prevail! Yet Valentine Samson was sufficiently quick to detect a wilfulness in Tryte's pose, and to be amused by it. Maxwell Tryte was not quite enjoying the show as patronizingly as he pretended. The Navy was cutting out Art.

Sir Everard happening by, saw his friend and stopped.

"Hallo, Sam. Want a partner?"

"Quite content, thanks. Rowena seems to be enjoying herself."

"Yes, God bless her."

"And our friend Tryte less so."

Sir Everard chuckled.

"Gate-crashed, but I let him stay. No chance with the Navy. Might do him good."

"Oh, he's not such a bad chap. Suffers from too much Tryte. After all—the world has done its best to spoil him."

"Why doesn't he shave that damned beard off?"

"Ask him. Part of the decor, my dear chap."

Sir Everard passed on to do his duty in persuading lone sailors to take dowagers in tow, and Samson cruised round the room, and approached Maxwell Tryte.

"Good show—this."

Tryte gave him a magnetic smile.

"Inexpressibly good. Just had a quaint notion."

"What?"

"Supposing you or I were a magician, and we waved a wand

and everybody's clothes fell off. Delicious nakedness. Universal ham-show. Not even fig-leaves."

Captain Samson frowned.

"Well, most of them would make pretty good showing."

"Including old Ravenstock and the Duchess of Dillwater!"

"Ravenstock hasn't run to tummy."

Samson could not help that thrust. It went home. He was aware of Tryte's hand giving a tug to his waistcoat. And then he laughed.

"I asked for it. Your hole, sir."

The sailor smiled.

"Honours easy. Come and have a drink, Tryte. I could do with one."

"I will, sir."

The prominence of Tryte's pose had drawn comments from other sources. Who was the little bounder with the blond beard who looked as though he had bought the earth? One Maxwell Tryte, a painter-fellow, one of the ultra-moderns; wrote books too, very impudent and catastrophic and all that. There was just one sailor in the room, a studious Engineer Officer, who had seen one of Tryte's London "Shows," and he had thought it "Crackers." He happened to be dancing with Rowena.

"Of course I'm not highbrow. I don't understand the stuff. Looks to me what the world might look like to a fellow who had the worst hang-over that ever was."

Rowena was enjoying the Navy.

"He wanted to paint me."

"Good God! Don't."

"I won't."

"Painting the lily, what!"

Rowena shook her head at him.

"Not much lily about me."

Later, reinforced by two drinks, Maxwell Tryte returned to his ballroom stance. He happened to see Rowena waltzing with Bill to the Blue Danube, and they danced it delightfully, both being tall and lithe and long in the leg. Tryte fondled his beard and confessed to his secret soul that he could not dance like that. One of the things even Genius could not do. Or compete with

the Navy on certain critical occasions. What use would he be on the bridge of a battleship?

He returned to the Villa Violet, conscious of an incipient stoutness and gastric depression.

V

A SERENE sea and a serene sky, and yet into Maxwell Tryte's consciousness had crept a peculiar feeling of insecurity. He was restless, unable to concentrate upon his work. It was like the vague sense of malaise before an illness. Liver—perhaps, and lack of exercise? However subtle and mysterious a mood might seem, it was no more than the shadow of things physical.

Tryte was frankly pagan, and more pagan than the pagans. There were no Sacred Groves, no Eleusinian Mysteries in his world. He lived as Rubens painted. Master of Craft he might be, but no man is a master of colour or of sound unless he is alive to the mysterious way in which a poem or a picture comes to create itself. Whence comes music? The more subtle the craft, the more the craftsman is its servant. The thing does what it does as it pleases, and the craftsman may not know how or why. Books write themselves. A song is sung in the air. The only people who know everything about it are the critics and the information-mongers of the B.B.C. who advise us as to what the artist intended, how he did it, why he did it. The people who do not do the things are those who talk learnedly about them. One can picture Chopin or Schubert listening open-mouthed to a dissertation on just how they came to produce a particular waltz or song.

"Dear, dear, I did not know I was as consciously clever as all that."

Yes, a strange feeling of incipient malaise. Something seemed to be wrong both with him and his work. Was he drying up? Of course not. This was one of those interludes from which all artists may suffer, future fecundity stirring in days that seem sterile. There must be pauses in production, unless you have a factory-mind. Maybe he had had too much sun and mimosa, too much Mediterranean limelight. The contrasts of cloud and the strange sad English greenness might be indicated.

The winter season was over, and St. Martin was emptying itself of its migrating population. There would be a pause before the next scene was staged. Tryte called it the "Bric-a-Brac Season," when strange, hermaphroditic people appeared from Paris and decorated the Plage with startling nudities, a Continental community that posed and jabbered, and could not quite make up its mind as to whether it was male or female.

Tryte had enjoyed two or three Bric-a-Brac seasons at St. Martin. Here was human decor that suggested every sort of Ism. But this year something in him flinched from it, the sensitive boyish core which, to conceal itself, made Tryte the man pull impudent faces and talk like a flaneur. The Bric-a-Brac Season would bore him, just because it was sick with the boredom of a pleasure-besotted world. Studies in the nude, and hairy at that. There were moments when Maxwell Tryte was haunted by the way the young Diana in Rowena Ravenstock had worn her floating frock.

And they were to be neighbours. Well, well, well! More provocation, and the lash of starry-eyed scorn.

Yes, Maxwell Tryte had a mood. He was bored. Even his work bored him, and that drove him to a kind of fury. What was the matter with brush, pencil and pen? Was it that some sort of strange house-cleaning was going on inside him, and that dust-sheets were in evidence, and a new decor was being evolved?

Madame Bertrand observed him, and observed to herself: "Monsieur is drinking too much, and taking no exercise, not even in bed with the ladies. And what he needs is not—women, but a woman to keep him in order."

Now, two or three months back a new book had gone to his

publishers. Its title was *Walls of Jericho*, and it was in the most tempestuous Tryte style. A book by Tryte was an event, and Max had thought no more about it. He would receive the usual eulogistic letter from the eminent Mr. Mellaby who directed the firm.

The letter came, and when Tryte had read it, his temper flared. Mr. Mellaby wrote, not merely as Max's publisher, but as a friend. He said, that in his humble opinion, *Walls of Jericho* was too candid, and perhaps a little cheap. Cheap! Ye Gods! Mr. Mellaby went on to say that the book was not up to Maxwell Tryte's earlier standard, that his sales were down, and that their travellers reported a certain stickiness in the lending libraries. It seemed that his public might be growing a little tired of too much Tryte.

Now, Mr. Mellaby might have a mellifluous name, but he was no fool. No publisher had a finer flair for the moods and tendencies of the reading world, and Mr. Mellaby had more than a feeling that a change was in the air. Many people were turning their eyes from the fleshpots to the future. They were asking questions, especially so the young, and the old who were still young. Was this easy-osity, safety first, get rich quick, restless and feverish phase going to last? What was it worth? There might be disaster round the corner. What of all these coloured shirts, and the swaggering young men who saw in violence a new world of self-expression? Mr. Mellaby detected a challenging seriousness among those who were not mere hedonistic fools or sentimental spinsters. They wanted more stuff in their books and their philosophy, something to hold on to, something that seemed worth while. The giggling, sneering, impudent playboy was going out of fashion. A new austerity might be forced upon the world. The Trytes might become like buzzing blowflies.

Mr. Mellaby said some of these things to his author.

"Why not try to take life and humanity more seriously?"

Tryte went tight in his tummy over that letter. Silly old sentimentalist! Did he want him to go Galsworthy?

Max wrote a curt and rude reply.

"Publish and be damned to you. I have no intention of going ga-ga."

But when his anger had cooled, Maxwell Tryte was conscious of being worried, yes, and just a little scared. His success in both his crafts had been so singular that he had ceased to reflect upon the future or upon finance. Tryte was a habit, an institution. When he went to America the Press pestered him before he had left the boat. He had never failed to sell a picture during the last seven years. Certain very wealthy connoisseurs collected him. In his best year his earned income had topped thirty thousand pounds, and at that period he had been living out of England, and had escaped income-tax and sur-tax. He owned two houses, and had saved perhaps twelve thousand pounds. For years he had been a happy spendthrift, satisfying every whim, eating everything that was out of season, drinking the most precious vintage wine, seeing expensive pretty ladies, living in silk in more senses than one. Was he not Maxwell Tryte, wit and genius, and beloved of Fortune? He had regarded his vogue as a plant that would flower perpetually, and know no drear December. Why hoard money until you were too old to be drinkworthy and bedworthy?

Tryte tried to laugh. Poor old Mellaby, pompous old ass! But his laughter was the laughter of a man who laughs to reassure himself.

Certain unpleasant reflections did occur to him.

With an English domicile he would be a pigeon to be plucked by the tax-mongers.

Had he been rash to buy "Stallards"? It had cost him ten thousand pounds.

And—old Mellaby had the reputation of being the most weather-wise publisher in London. He had plumped for and seen his judgment justified by a series of best sellers. He had a nose for subtle popular flavours. What if Mellaby was not talking into his hat?

Well, if sales did fall, what of it? He had his pictures. He could take to portraits. He could do a little economizing, cut out his London flat. The fact was he had gone a little stale. Maybe he had had too large a dose of St. Martin and Rosalie and little drinks. He would have to buy a belt for that tummy of his, and tighten up life a bit in more ways than one.

Yes, Maxwell Tryte would always be Maxwell Tryte. Genius could not falter.

Captain Valentine Samson was one of the last migrants to leave St. Martin. A sojourn at a cheap hotel had saved him money, and he had had good news. His semi-derelict sister had found an old gentleman to marry her, so poor Kate was off his bank account. That meant a clear hundred and fifty a year.

Moreover, he had received a telegram from Sir Everard.

"Have bought 'Maythorn.' Come and look at it."

On the day before his journey home Samson strolled to the cape and turned in at the gate of the "Villa Violet." He and Tryte might once more be neighbours, and though the sailor was a most uncommercial man, it did occur to him that Tryte might be a future customer. If Tryte gave luxurious parties prime fruit might be needed in considerable quantities. It happened to be one of those greyish days when cloud matches the mountains, and to Valentine Samson St. Martin had a tired and shabby look. It's face was dusty. Almost it was the face of a woman who had passed through a hectic season and was feeling her age.

Samson wandered up through the garden to the terrace. The place was still flowery, but with a suggestion of being overblown. On the terrace the sailor saw a long chair, a pair of naked feet, and a sleeping face on a purple cushion. Tryte's mouth was open, and he was snoring. The impression he gave was one of flabby stupor.

Samson hesitated. Should he wake the fellow up, or back away? But the question was answered by Tryte coming to life with a heave and a splutter as though emerging from the depths of some unpleasant dream.

He blinked at Samson.

"Hullo. Oh, it's you. Caught me napping. Have a drink?"

That appeared to be Tryte's response to all eventualities. Samson took off his hat and sat down.

"Thanks, no. Thought I would look in on you before I left."

Tryte was smoothing his hair. His shirt was unbuttoned, and he became conscious of it, perhaps because the sailor's eyes had observed his unbuttoned state.

"Going back to dear old England to play with the maybugs. How nice."

Samson pulled out a pipe and a pouch, and was silent for some seconds.

"Best country in the world to live in. A sailor ought to know."

"So bloody respectable."

"A little more than that. By the way, I may be a neighbour of yours, if you come to England."

"Oh," laughed Tryte, "joinin' the 'untin' and shootin' fraternity?"

"No," said the sailor with taut emphasis, "I may be going to grow fruit."

To Tryte fruit was either something colourful piled on a dish, or a luxury enjoyed out of season. How, where or why it was grown did not enter or entertain his curiosity. Cherries from Kent—of course, and plums from Worcestershire, strawberries from Hants, and apples from Essex, but the growers were of a strange and unknown race.

"Is it—a joke, sir?"

"No joke growing fruit."

"No, I meant—you doing it."

Samson lit his pipe. Everything other people did appeared to be a joke to Tryte.

"Just tired of wandering about. Got a small fruit-farm in view. Not a bad anchorage."

"Nice bit of country—too. Quite decorative. So, we shall be neighbours. I'm glad. Don't suppose I shall see much of the yokels."

"I—shall be a yokel. What's your idea of a yokel, Tryte?"

"Oh, something with a fringe on it's chin, and sucking a straw. Pity they have given up smocks."

"There—are—others."

"Such as——?"

"Ravenstock——"

"Dear old Baron Boko."

Samson bit hard on his pipe.

"You're a clever sort of clown, Tryte, but I have a feeling that people are growing mistrustful of mere cleverness."

Tryte's mouth hung open for a moment as though a blow had winded him. Was Captain Samson with old Mellaby among the prophets?

"Sorry, sir, I think I deserved—that. What would you prescribe?"

Samson gave him that little steely smile.

"A year as a fag at Winchester, or a year or two as a Snotty. Not a bad experience for the impudently young."

VI

IN the cause of austerity and finance Captain Valentine Samson travelled third, a most improper thing to do, breaking his journey at Marseilles and Paris, and somehow enjoying the French who travelled with him. His impression was and had been that there was nothing much wrong with the world's peasantry, but that society had gone to seed at the top. He was no socialist, for, to a man who believed in discipline, socialism might be dangerous slobber. Anything like a committee was anathema to Samson. Could you take a battleship into action with a committee on the bridge? Someone had to be devilishly responsible. Someone had to make decisions. Someone had to issue orders.

In London he put up at his club for a night before going down to Medworth to spy out the promised land. It was characteristic of Samson that he did not write to Ravenstock, and so risk an invitation to stay at "Tanwood," for the captain of a ship can be a lonely person, and life had made of Samson a separative soul. He liked to be by himself in his own corner, in his own chair, free from chatter and the artificial brightness that it behoves a guest to show. He could be sociable at the right time, and at the proper place, and with the right people, but in the profound

privacies of his individual mind he was what he described as a complete curmudgeon.

Valentine Samson arrived at Medworth with an old leather suitcase and a bag of golf clubs. Golf was the only game he allowed himself, perhaps because if needs be he could play it alone. "The Crown" at Medworth was Three Starred in the A.A. list, and to "The Crown" he went, to be confronted on the inn's very doorstep by a protesting petticoat.

"I say, Uncle, what—are—you doing here?"

Rowena called him uncle, and he liked it.

"Putting up."

"Oh, no, you're not. Why didn't you tell us? I've got my Morris round the corner."

Samson gave her a smile of stubborn affection.

"Masterful young madam. Thank you, my dear, but I never stay with anybody."

"But you are staying with us."

"I—am—not. I like to be a bear in my own den. Crusty old brute. I'll come up for tea."

"I'll fetch you."

"I'd love to be fetched. How's everybody?"

"Top-hole."

Rowena did not understand such separativeness; her father did. He too had arrived at a maturity that refused to be entertained.

All this was new country to Valentine Samson, clay of the Weald, sand of the Forest Ridge, silver grey downs in the north. The little Jew boys do not love the great open spaces, but Samson the sailor had that feeling for landscape which is the Englishman's adventure in aesthetics. He liked his pictures alive, not in an art-gallery. When he had worn a beard, which he had done, it had been a different beard from Maxwell Tryte's, black, sharp and fierce, not Bohemian blond. So, he sat silent and still beside Rowena as she drove her Morris out of Medworth. Rowena drove like a young she-devil, with an apparent recklessness that was justified, for Rowena had hands, and a safe seat. She was up to Wimbledon form at tennis, and could smite a golf-ball with most men.

Uncle Sam was not scared. He sat with his hat on his knees, and surveyed the landscape and liked it. Good green country to end your years in, and to assuage with a large, calm hand any restlessness that might be left in you.

He glanced at Rowena's profile. Winged Victory! Rowena attended to business and kept her dark and steadfast eyes upon the road.

"Tryte's place in view anywhere?"

"Wouldn't it be?" said she.

"Well, is it?"

"Look straight ahead, halfway up the ridge. Stockbroker's Tudor squatting on a terrace."

Samson looked. He had very long sight.

"Thought it was an old place."

"So it was. The previous bastard pulled it down—and did that."

Rowena's language was brisk and fresh, and like March wind in April, but Captain Samson was not scared of the young.

"Tryte is supposed to have taste."

She gave him one quick glance, and then turned her destructive eyes on a cyclist who came round a corner in the middle of the road.

"Want to be killed, you fool?"

The fool wobbled away from them, and Samson chuckled. This young Amazon must be a shock to the sentimentalists.

"And why did Tryte buy that?"

"Wouldn't he? The beastly thing shows off. Look at it's damned white waistcoat."

"My child," said Samson, "you have a tongue."

They turned left into a side-road, and the thorn hedges were in flower.

"That's 'Maythorn' over there. Little red place up among the apple trees."

"Looks good to me."

"It is. Good name too, and right in the middle of it's name. Now, if that clown had taken that."

"You would have thought him less of a clown?"

"Definitely," and her firm young lips were lovely in their clearness.

Samson saw a little green valley opening ahead of them.

"That's us," said she, "pure Jane Austen. I think I should have got on with Jane."

Iron gates open under the gloom of great beeches, a drive winding between green velvet, high woods, the gleam of a fish-pond, and set serenely behind old cedars, a long white house with green verandas, and a low grey overhanging roof. Wistaria scrambled over it. It's French windows stared you straight in the face with infinite placidity. A tennis court lay below a grass-banked terrace. In the open woodland above bluebells were azure mist.

Barking dogs came out to meet the car, friendly dogs, and as Samson opened the door a brown spaniel arrived on his lap, proposing to lick his face. Rowena had sounded a summons on her horn. Captain Samson had the spaniel's head between his hands.

"Nice of you, but I've had a wash, old fellow."

"It's a she," said Rowena. "It would be. Fanny's always like that with strange men."

"Disgraceful," and Samson kissed the dog's head.

Then came Sir Everard, in old brown jacket and white flannel trousers, comfortably shabby, and pleased to see a friend.

"Well, Sam, old man, did this young she-devil make your hair stand up?"

"Which one?" asked the sailor.

Rowena jabbed him with an elbow.

"Me. Fanny is Victorian Sentimental slut. Get out, Uncle, and I'll put Nuffield away."

Samson got out, and was taken by the arm, and led into that most pleasant house, with its spacious shabbiness, its soft lights, and gracious furniture. It was a house of cushions and dogs, guns and comfortable chairs, a house that was at peace.

It was a warm day in May and they had tea in the shady depths of a green veranda. Dogs lay at their feet. Rowena, the young mistress of the house since her mother's death, fed Uncle Sam

with buttered scones and home made plum cake. This English scene was all that Valentine Samson asked for. If his days of facing green seas were over, this green world would give him harbourage.

Sir Everard and the sailor talked of "Maythorn." Rowena sat silent, with a golden retriever's nose upon her knee. She caressed the dog's head, and it's lovely eyes were adoring. Rowena was gentle with dogs, if masterful with men. Captain Samson, smoking his pipe, observed her and thought how many a young man would suffer pangs because of her. Lovely she was in her clear, cold virginity, a dark Diana, a little hard as yet like her firm young breasts.

"When you have finished your pipe, Sam, we'll go and spy out Canaan."

"Any time you like."

"Right. No need to drive. We'll stroll. You'll stay to dinner."

"Of course he will," said Rowena.

Samson smiled at her, and got up on his long legs.

"Orders are orders—even from the young."

The dogs were up and barking. Rowena lighted a second cigarette.

"No, not coming. I'm going to try a new mashie on the lower lawn."

"Replace divots," said her father.

A little lane led them up to "Maythorn" between high wind-break hedges. The old house stood upon a gentle hill, above frost-holes and sheltered from the north, and this same hill was one great smother of apple-blossom. The old house, or rather cottage, was timber and brick and tile, with casement windows, and a deep porch over which a China rose scrambled. Its one brick chimney-stack stood up solid and sure.

Sir Everard swept his stick at the orchard.

"Regular tented field. Fancy the look of it?"

Samson was silent, but his eyes were almost as tender as a woman's.

"Perfect spot. How's labour down here?"

"Lazy as usual, or rather—born-slow. Let's go inside. Got

the key. I'd get a Scotchman, or a young chap who has the knowledge and the guts and wants to better himself."

"May do six months myself as a pupil. Would you sell?"

"Of course. What it cost me."

"And interest on the capital."

"I don't charge interest to friends."

Sir Everard unlocked a solid green door.

"Gosh. Of course! Why didn't I think of it before. Old Will Spray. Sixty-three, but tougher than most lads. Knows the job. Used to be 'Head' at 'Stallards,' and doesn't like the new idea. Well, let's poke around."

Poke around they did, in this silent, quietly breathing little house. The rooms were so well proportioned that they looked more spacious than they were. It had been a candle and lamp house, but the late owner had installed a small electric light plant, and an oil engine to pump water from the well. The place was in perfect condition, its colour primrose and cream. The brick floor of the kitchen had been replaced by tongued and grooved boarding, and the kitchen fitments were modern.

"No dry-rot anywhere. Like it?"

"Tight little place. Wonder you wish to sell."

"Wouldn't just to anybody. Get a game of golf now."

Samson chuckled.

"That the only reason? Yes, by Gemini, I could sling my hammock here. You've done me a good turn, old man."

"Mixed motives, Sam. I'm no altruist."

"Yes, dangerous people—altruists."

"Stallards" was Surrey, Tanwood and Maythorn were Sussex. No insult to Surrey this, most lovely of English counties where the great valley runs between the chalk and the greensand, and where man has not fouled it. Moreover, the original "Stallards" had been nothing but a cottage, an unpretentious place, until it had been elevated to the Peerage, and fitted with terrace, rock-garden, pergolas, water-garden and what-not. Some of Maxwell Tryte's toadies had wondered at his purchasing such a place. Terrible lapse in taste. Or was it just Max's naughtiness? At any

rate he would command the landscape and about ten spare bedrooms, be sheltered from the north wind, and become the master of a cellar that had been built as in the days when the Bottle-a-Day Man flourished. It also owned a hard court, very red and electric, and a bathing-pool at the foot of the hill, whose blueness was obtained by a lining of sky-blue tiles.

What the devil a lone bachelor wanted with such a place might have puzzled the vulgar, even though it could house a harem, and store unlimited drink. Was it that Max must have a place in the country to entertain his clique and to make a parade of his success? Some witty person nicknamed it "Stallions." The place was being furnished and decorated in the most provocative modern style. Tryte had commissioned one of the most flamboyant masters of modern decor to produce a startling interior. There was the Room of the Mirrors, the Room of the Devils, the Room of the Nymphs, attenuated and anaemic young women posing in various tired attitudes. Tryte had suggested a Haunted Bedroom, its walls placarded with green ghosts. Some guest whom he might wish to chasten could be plumped into that room.

Old Will Spray, Sussex of the Sussex, blue eyes, with a blond moustache going grey, could and did scratch his head over these phantasies, and feel that "Stallards" was no longer a place for him. In fact he had never felt at home in that grimacing garden, even though the money had been good. But what was money when you were growing old, and asked for the comforting and pure fruits of the earth? Will Spray was a Saxon soul who might have dwelt apart in some forest clearing in the days before William of Normandy. Never in his life had he been to a cinema, and "Stallards" was utter Hollywood.

So, when Sir Everard drove up one day and found Will trying to instil into a lout the habit of work, and announced to him that the new owner of "Maythorn" wanted a trusty man, Will's staring blue eyes filled suddenly with crinkles of light. "Maythorn" was real; "Maythorn" was old English; "Maythorn" was fruit.

"What sort o' gentleman, sir. Y'see, some of these new gentlemen do tarrify me."

"A friend of mine, Will. A naval officer who has retired."

"Sure, if he be a friend o' yours, sir——"

"Captain Samson is a gentleman of the old school, Will. Why not go and see him. The trouble is he may not be able to afford to pay what Mr. Tryte might do."

"A few bob a week don't signify, sir, so long as you feel comfortable."

"Wise man, Will."

So Will Spray put on his Sunday suit, and walked from the cottage which he owned, to "Maythorn." It was a Saturday afternoon, and Will found Captain Samson at work with a hoe in the orchard. He was still at "The Crown"; had hired a bike and rode over every day.

Will touched his cap.

"Sir Everard, 'e said as you be wanting a man, sir."

"Oh—you are Will Spray."

"I be, sir."

"Glad to see you, Will. Let's go in and have some beer."

Samson had transported half a dozen bottles and a couple of glasses in his handle basket, and beer is a great leveller and a potent persuader. Moreover, both men had a happy thirst. In all else they were human contrasts, save in their integrity. They liked each other at the first glance. Samson was a sea-gentleman, Will a gentleman of the soil.

They talked and sat in the porch and drank beer.

"Sir Everard has spoken very highly of you, Will."

Will smiled and looked coy.

"I don't know whether you would care to work for me. The trouble is I'm not rich like Mr. Tryte."

"Rich is as feels rich, sir."

"That's a good saying. I could manage forty-five bob a week."

"I'd be satisfied with that, sir."

"My idea is to sell. I'd pay you ten per cent on all sales. What we call a bonus."

Will nodded and wiped some froth from his blond moustache.

"I'd give 'ee the best I could, sir."

"I know you would."

So, the bargain was struck between them.

VII

MAXWELL TRYTE had travelled to England, and with him Madame Bertrand, that inscrutable, wax white woman with her helmet of black hair. Madame Bertrand had been taught to speak English, and she had become somewhat essential to Maxwell Tryte, and at "Stallards" she was to act as housekeeper. It was an experiment, but worth making. She knew all his whims and ways and foibles, and subscribed to them with a calm, silent, and calculating efficiency.

The "Villa Violet" had its blue shutters closed, and was left to the care of Roberto and his wife, and the local gendarmerie whom Tryte feed generously to patrol his property. In London Max went to his flat, Madame Bertrand to an hotel in Bloomsbury. The flat was a service one, and the complications and jealousies of a staff were spared him.

Madame was to engage the "Stallards" staff, a cook, a house and parlour maid, and if possible a kitchen maid. Max had never fallen to a valet, perhaps because he preferred to keep his affairs free from the supervision of a male parasite. The experiment was Madame's. If successful it would save him much trouble. Genius should not be cumbered with the perversities of the vulgar.

He purchased a car, a super-car, a coupé, painted a bright yellow, with fawn coloured fittings. He did not go to see Mr. Mellaby, though *Walls of Jericho* was on the eve of publication. Mr. Montefiore of "The Gretna Galleries" he did visit, and Mr. Montefiore welcomed the prospect of a summer show. A number of canvases were on the rail from St. Martin, safely crated

"As you like. I have a car outside."

"I'll have the gin taken out, sir."

Someone else had parked a car behind Tryte's, and that someone was scrutinizing the yellow chariot with appreciation and envy. Some car—this! Ought to do ninety. And what speed-lines!

Maxwell Tryte, arriving on the pavement, was confronted by Miss Rowena Ravenstock. He was hatless, but he saluted her with a characteristic gesture, an extended first finger laid against his forehead.

"Morning, oh—Queen. Yes, that is my car."

She looked him straight in the face.

"Yellow."

"My dear, do you infer——?"

"Oh, nothing."

"Perhaps you prefer navy blue? Coming to my party?"

"No."

"That's a pity. It is going to be a posh party. Well, let's leave it open," and he entered the dove-coloured interior.

She watched him drive off with silence and smoothness. What a car! Why should the little clown possess such a car? Damn him! And she had a feeling that he had had the best of the back-chat. Go to his party? Not she. And yet she might. There was to be tennis. She could knock spots off the little man at tennis.

Madame Bertrand passed out on a pilgrimage, and with a black and white solidity that was deliberate and purposeful. She came to the glass-houses. She peered into the vinery, and tried the door. It was locked. She passed on to the peach and nectarine houses, and through the glass could see the fruit immature as yet upon the trees. Those doors also were locked. Next, the tomato house showed itself decorated with brilliant and early fruit. Again, the door was locked against her.

She saw the youngest of the gardeners trundling a barrow, and she hailed him.

"Where is Stubbs?"

The lad was a lout.

"Eh?"

"I said—where is Stubbs?"

"Dunno," and he passed on with a stare that said "Find him yerself."

Madame Bertrand did find Stubbs up-ended over a cucumber frame.

"Good morning, Stubbs. I want the keys."

He slewed round on her, and his sly and rather sinister face was an open book to Josephine. Madame Bertrand knew men, were they English, French, or Italian.

"Keys. What keys?"

"The keys of the glass-houses. I wish to look."

Stubbs rubbed his hands on his backsides. He was not going to be ordered about or interfered with by a bloody French-woman.

"What for?"

Madame Bertrand looked down upon him. She was taller than he was.

"You will give me the keys, Stubbs, and you will leave the keys with me every evening before you go."

"Not me," said he, "I'm head man here, and I take my orders——"

"You take them from me, Stubbs. I manage—for Mr. Tryte."

Stubbs stared at her, and his eyes were evil.

"Well, that's news to me. I don't hand over no keys without the boss sayin' so."

"He has said so."

"Not to me."

"I give you his orders and mine. Mr. Tryte must not be worried with little stupidities. You waste my time, Stubbs."

He glared at her, but he groped in a pocket and produced the keys.

"Going to count the tomatoes?"

"Yes," she said, "I am."

It was otherwise at Maythorn where Captain Samson, having gathered a community of austere and simple furniture in the cottage, had been provided by providence and Will Spray with

a "Treasure." She was a cousin of Will's, and a widow, and her name was Tribute, Euphemia Tribute, and known to Will as Effie. A little woman, hardly five feet high, with a merry crumpled face, and speedwell blue eyes, and Effie, like many little women, was a bundle of energy and pragmatism.

Sir Everard, waiting in the porch, after using the brass, lion-headed knocker, found Mrs. Tribute at his feet. He was so tall and she so small, that his chin was on his chest when he looked at her.

"The captain in?"

"He's in the orchard, sir, with Will. Shall I find him for you?"

"Thank you. I'll go and look."

Sir Everard, standing at the head of one of the orchard aisles saw Samson and Will spraying the trees. Will, being the more experienced, was holding the lance, while the sailor pumped away at the wheeled tank. Sir Everard caressed his nose. He had hoped for a game of golf, but here it seemed that work would come before pleasure. Work? Pleasure? Were not the two words synonymous?

Sir Everard strolled down between the trees. To the sucking prattle of the pump was added the soft hissing of the spray. Neither of the two men saw or heard him, so intent were they on the job.

"Hallo, Sam. All hands to the pump!"

"Hallo, old man."

Samson had stopped pumping and the mist from the lance-head died away.

"Sorry, Will."

"This tree be finished, sir."

"We'll knock off for five minutes."

"Don't," said Sir Everard, "I'll trundle along with you. Any chance of a game of golf?"

"I could manage to-morrow—after tea—if that's not too late."

"No, top-hole. By the way, had a cheeky invitation from the Tryte fellow to a party?"

"I have."

"Going?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not. I don't like being patronized by a play-boy."

Samson smiled.

"Takes all sorts of people to sail a ship. That's a good old platitude. Tryte's at war with platitudes. Not a bad sort of fellow under all that paint."

"You're too tolerant, Sam."

"Tolerant! I'm one of the worst tempered men in the world. Ask Will."

Will grinned.

"Be you, sir?"

Said Sir Everard: "What Mr. Max Tryte wants is a rough passage to reduce the bulge."

"He may get it," said his friend. "I've never known life leave a man unlicked."

Walls of Jericho was published a week before the house-warming at "Stallards." Hitherto Maxwell Tryte had enjoyed a clamorous and laudatory Press, but whether the critics were sincere in cursing the book, or had become peevish over Max's superlative success, they were unanimous in lifting a leg over it. "Mr. Maxwell Tryte is presuming upon the patience of his public." "There are passages in this book, which for bad taste, are quite deplorable." "Mr. Maxwell Tryte is becoming too much Tryte." "*Walls of Jericho* walls do not fall. Mr. Tryte's trumpet is becoming too brazen." "The book gibbers at you. Mr. Tryte should take a rest. I must confess that I am tired of being told that anything English is the quintessence of sottishness."

Max, of course, subscribed to a Press Bureau, and Miss Smith, opening the envelopes that contained these cuttings, became quite apologetic in producing them to the maestro. Max shrugged, and pulled playful faces. Jealousy—of course. Old hens always cackled in chorus. Like all public institutions he provoked the petulance of the little people. The astonishing thing was that it had not happened before. When an author's sales passed the twenty thousand mark he became a red rag to the miserable devils who could never get themselves published.

But though he pulled grimaces at his detractors, Maxwell Tryte was not feeling smooth inside. Hostile criticism was new to him. Hitherto he had been petted and caressed, and these sudden cuffings surprised and irritated him. Would old Mellaby feel justified in saying—"I told you so"? Max would not allow that he was worried, but worried he was. Celebrities can be hypersensitive creatures.

Should he ring up Mellaby? No, damn it, that would betray a lack of faith in himself and his craft. But ring Mellaby he did, about eleven o'clock in the morning of June 29.

"Hallo, hallo, is that you—Mell? Max speaking. Well, how goes it? Coming to my party?"

Mr. Mellaby sounded rather upon his dignity.

"No, I am afraid I have someone for the weekend, Gavin, the new man whose novel——"

"Damn Gavin!" thought Tryte, "is the old fellow off with a new best-seller?"

"Oh, Gavin, yes. Well, how are the walls falling?"

There appeared to be a moment of silence at Mellaby's end.

"They are not," said his dry voice.

"Well, more trumpet. Suppose you are advertising all over the place."

"Have you seen the reviews?" asked the voice.

"Sour grapes," said Tryte.

"The worst press you have had, ever."

Max began to feel irritated.

"That's a good sign. Ought to pique the public."

"I'm afraid it doesn't appear to be doing so. The big buyers have cut their orders. Repeats poor."

"Silly fools," said Max, and rang off.

ROWENA changed her mind, the supposed prerogative of a woman, but she was a definite young person and when she changed her mind she did it thoroughly.

She arrived at "Stallards" in the blue Morris complete with racket and white tennis kit. White became her dark young comeliness. Max might have said that she had lovely legs.

A waiter, hired for the occasion, led her to the terrace where Max's party had assembled.

"What name, Miss?"

"Miss Ravenstock."

The man announced her, but Maxwell Tryte was very much engaged for the moment, gun to gun with Harold Catchpole, the novelist, who had assumed the role of High Priest of English Literature. Max had invited Harold Catchpole as one might engage a performing elephant, but Catchpole's performance had been impertinently personal. He was large, and greasy, and arrogant, with an immense forehead and yellow teeth.

"I have been reading your latest, Tryte."

"Like it?"

"If you will pardon me—I think it is in very doubtful taste."

That had set Max firing point-blank into the pompous bulk. To be reproved by Catchpole, the smeariest of the smeary, who preached Lit-er-a-ture, and advertised himself on every possible occasion! So, Rowena was left poised upon the steps, to gaze with a certain wild hauteur upon this cosmopolitan crowd, youthful head in air and refusing to be conspicuously embarrassed.

Then Tryte, side-stepped from a Catchpole who had grown very red of face, and who appeared to be perspiring, saw that slim and aloof figure on the steps, and hurried to welcome it. Diana after Old Greasy! Why had she come? But did it matter? The young goddess had descended from Olympus.

"Forgive me. I was in a debate. Really sporting of you to come."

Rowena bent her head to him.

"Thank you. Is my racket out of place?"

"No. It's a symbol. I'll get a four for you. I might play, though I'm a cony."

She smiled at him vaguely, aloofly. Why cony? Why couldn't he say rabbit?

"Come and be introduced."

"Must I?"

Max laughed.

"Well, no; one doesn't introduce the lily to Covent Garden cabbages. So, come and have tea, and then we'll knock the balls about."

Tryte was in cream silk trousers and a pale blue pullover, plus sandals. Did he propose to play tennis in sandals? Well, he might be winged Mercury. He convoyed her through the crowd to the long tea-table, and certain of his intimates, gazing upon Rowena, exchanged smiles. Who was the Lovely? Max's latest? Madame Bertrand, in charge of the commissariat, looked with her inscrutable black eyes at Rowena. Had this proud young person any significance, or was she just another incident in the Maestro's gallery of sex?

Captain Valentine Samson arrived late. He had walked. He was announced, but there was no one to greet him. The crowd was no concern of his. He diverged towards the tea-table, and there Madame Bertrand recognized and welcomed him.

"Good afternoon, Monsieur le Capitaine. Tea or whisky-soda?"

"Tea please, madame."

Madame served him with impressment. This—was a man.

"Mr. Tryte—about?"

"Playing tennis, monsieur."

Samson accepted the cup from her, helped himself to a cucumber sandwich, and stood to survey the crowd.

Yes, this was a Tryte world, restless, over-animated, full of gabble, self-consciously on show. Each little ego had to make a noise and insist upon its validity. Why must people chatter and

fidget, and smile insincere smiles, and take care that they were not out-talked or out-moded? Samson could stand alone, quite still and in silence, and remain unconscious of his isolation, and that is man's ultimate dignity, the consummation of unselfconscious consciousness. Affectation he could not abide. He would have said: "If your self is worth while, be it."

Madame Bertrand watched him. He might have for her a significance that was secret to herself. He was a man to be feared, and liked—even in fearing. Was it that his integrity might be courteously ruthless were it involved in a friend's cause? This man might act like a sailor taking a ship into action. Captain Samson turned to the table, and madame was quick to proffer him a dish of cakes.

"They are very good, monsieur."

"Marzipan; what."

"Yes, monsieur. So, monsieur is settled in England?"

Samson looked at her as he might have looked at a cloud on the horizon.

"Hope so. And how does madame like England?"

She shrugged.

"It is my affair, monsieur, to like your country."

"Attention to business."

His eyes seemed to narrow as he looked at her solid, handsome face. What the devil was it about her that suggested that attention to business was attention to Tryte? Inscrutable woman—this! Calm, cold, determined, rather like an iceberg floating in a steadfast sea. Dangerous to you—below water. Queer how feelings came to you about things and people like the danger you sensed on a dark and dirty night.

"More tea, monsieur?"

"Thank you."

She looked at his cup and not at him, almost as though she had something to hide, and had been aware of his observing her with inward eyes. This man seemed to look under your skin, and not at the mask you might show to the world.

"It is—sugar, monsieur?"

"Please. So Mr. Tryte is playing tennis."

He got the impression that the white solidity of her hardened.

Her eyes were dead black. Very deep water there, or he had no knowledge of women and of seas.

"Mr. Tryte—he must amuse himself, monsieur."

"And somehow," thought Samson, "madame is not pleased."

When he had finished his tea and had refused the cigarette Madame Bertrand had offered him from the silver box on the table, Valentine Samson strolled down to the hard court and the bathing pool. He paused half way down the path to fill and light a pipe. Damned, flimsy things, cigarettes, rather like the generation that smoked them. Coming to an opening in a hedge of cypresses Samson saw the red court below him, and it provided him with a surprise, young Rowena playing tennis with Maxwell Tryte as her partner!

Well, well, well! The hostile mantle of the father did not of necessity drape the daughter. Samson remained where he was, watching the play. Rowena and Max were opposed by a middle-aged couple who had played much pawky tennis together and were irritatingly steady and dull in scooping back everything. But the sailor had not been watching the game for more than two minutes before he realized that there might be more in it than the mere smiting of a ball.

Miss Rowena Ravenstock was very much in charge of the game. It appeared that Maxwell Tryte had been confined to a quarter of the court while Diana hunted as she pleased.

"Leave it, partner. Mine—partner."

The pawky pair were for peppering Tryte and making easy points, for Max would stand at the net, where he was lobbed or passed, or fumbled anything he could hit. But Rowena was capable of countering such strategy; her serving and her return of service were fast and well placed; she ran up and cut off returns at the net, volleying crisply, and when the pawky pair lobbed, she was back on flashing legs, and lobbing them in return.

Samson was intrigued. How did Max like playing the part of rabbit and supernumerary?

"Leave it to me."

There was no salute to Genius in her orders, while she swept about the court, and made mere man appear futile. Samson

puffed at his pipe. Now, what was the esoteric significance of the game, and of Rowena's putting Genius in a corner? Had the naughty young wench come to Max's party to prove to him how poor a play-boy he could be on a tennis court? Possibly. There is a mischievous urchin in all of us, even in solemn sea-captains and comely young women.

"Excuse me, sir," said a voice.

Samson drew aside, with a "Sorry" to make room for the streaming bulk of Mr. Harold Catchpole. The great man too was intrigued. He stood and watched the game, and was pleased by the exhibition on the court below.

"Not Tryte's metier, sir."

Samson was studying Mr. Catchpole. A greasy and sententious person this, and perspiring with complacency. Samson did not know that he was in the presence of Literature's High Priest, and the sailor was one of those stark and simple souls who mistrust anything that has run to tummy. Guts should be taut and tight, and if a man had septic yellow teeth why not change them for dentures?

"No. A man isn't good at everything."

Mr. Catchpole appeared to take this as a challenge.

"Admire Tryte's work?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"I give him three years. The young wench seems very active."

Young wench—indeed! Did this slob of a Silenus appreciate life's most pertinent differences?

"Rather good to watch. Something that can move, and hasn't run to seed."

He stared significantly at Mr. Catchpole's tummy, and the great man was not blind to this impertinent scrutiny.

"Meaning—Tryte, sir?"

"As you please. Miss Rowena Ravenstock is our star turn in these parts."

Mr. Catchpole gazed with muddy blue eyes at the scene below. Was this long, lean fellow trying to be facetious?

"I'm afraid I can't subscribe, sir, to the strange English cult. Hitting a ball."

"More in it than that, I think," said Valentine Samson, "the cult of keeping fit."

Mr. Catchpole swallowed, and appearing to become bored with the argument, turned about and reascended the path. He had legs like bolsters, and Captain Samson, having smiled a little wicked smile at them, turned again to watch those other legs. But the game was over. Rowena had carried her rabbit to victory, and Tryte was being gallant.

"Well, you pulled me through."

She looked past him and up at Valentine Samson.

"Hallo, Uncle. Aren't you playing?"

"Hallo, my dear. No, I've joined the spectators."

Maxwell Tryte was fondling his blond little beard. Yes, obviously no kudos had come to him in this arena. Miss Rowena Ravenstock had treated him like a fumbling old rustic or a rather futile urchin.

Rowena drove Captain Samson home, and on the way he asked her an avuncular question.

"Well, you naughty girl, did you do it on purpose?"

"Do what?"

"Oh lamb of innocence and limb of Satan!"

Rowena gave him a flick of her dark eyes.

"You aren't like most sailors, Uncle."

"Is that so. And how?"

"They are good children, but—rather obvious. You're an old devil."

"I don't mind the devil, but I object to the old. And you haven't answered my question."

"Yes—I did."

"Chastening the play-boy by showing off. Oh—yes—you were."

"I wasn't."

"Tut-tut. Well, you played a very pretty game. Now, mind the corner."

"Corners are my business, Uncle."

"So it seems."

They missed the ditch by inches, but youth takes its corners

in that way, and Rowena pulled up outside the white field-gate of "Maythorn."

"May I come in, Uncle?"

"Honoured, I'm sure."

"I'd like to look at fruit-trees after all that—lousy stuff."

"The urge is better than the language, my dear."

"Nuff said. Don't be preachy."

"God forbid."

It was the secret season in the orchard. The evening sunlight lay upon the little hill and gave a golden tinge to its greenness. It shone too upon Rowena's face, suddenly grown soft and childish, and Captain Samson smiled to himself as he strolled beside her down one of the drifts. How youth loved itself, and was like green fruit! Rowena was Rowena, and all for Rowena, little thinking—perhaps—that life's lovely foolishness would play tricks with the hard young self. Yes, there were great possibilities in Rowena. She could lose her toughness in this simple country scene.

"I don't see any apples, Uncle."

"Eve should know all about apples."

"Aren't there any?"

Samson turned to a tree.

"This is the time, my love, so Will tells me, when the little devils play tricks with you. Hide and seek. One week—not an apple to be seen, and then the little green beggars suddenly grin at you. Look here."

He held up a branch, and there they were—clusters of young fruit.

"See. They are here all right."

And he thought—"Some day, my dear, you may suddenly find yourself with fruit. Nature is like that."

MEDWORTH had a good deal to say about "Stallards" and "Stallards's" new owner, and Medworth had a good deal to say about everything and everyone. The previous possessor of "Stallards" had dealt locally with grocer, ironmonger, confectioner and butcher, but it appeared that Stallards imported all its supplies from Knightsbridge. According to Medworth that was not cricket, but what could you expect when a darned French woman ruled the roost.

For that was how the vulgar-minded in Medworth saw it, also Mr. Samuel Stubbs and Mr. Samuel Stubbs's wife. La Belle France was very much in authority—and why? Well, wasn't the explanation obvious? It was, and very much so, to Medworth.

Maxwell Tryte was a very tactless person so far as the conventions were concerned. He did what he pleased, and asked no questions so long as his bath was hot, and his butter fresh, and the cuisine to his liking. He would do the most indiscreet things with the assurance of a spoilt small-boy, things that set tongues wagging.

The Stallards billiards-room had been adapted as a studio. It had a large north window, and a glass superstructure overhead. Tryte had had it fitted up in Pompeian style. Billiards balls were not needed, nor phallic emblems. He himself produced the frescoes on the walls, and they were considerably immodest.

Now, Max needed a model for a new conception of his. Its title was "France Looks In A Mirror," and for the figure of La Belle France Madame Bertrand could not be bettered. Would Josephine sit for him? She would. But a sufficient stage was needed, and a local carpenter was introduced to produce it. When the inspiration was upon him Maxwell Tryte was a creature of impatience, and while the carpenter worked upon his stage, Madame sat on a low, gold brocaded divan and had her head and shoulders sketched. She wore a Phrygian cap, a low black dress that left her luscious shoulders bare, and a red, white

and blue scarf about her waist. Imperturbable, solid, enigmatic she sat there and thought her own thoughts. She had no knowledge of the fantastic reflection that was to manifest in the mirror. That did not matter. She was the Maestro's model, and her strong white hands were not incapable of moulding life according to plan.

Once a week she travelled to London to do her marketing, and to purchase all those delicacies which the Maestro loved. She was indefatigable in feeding him. Everything that was out of season should be his. So, she sat with folded hands, calmly and maturely handsome, with a face of milk, an admirable model.

But the significance of the scene was appreciated elsewhere. The carpenter from Medworth, leery of eye and with a walrus moustache, sawed and hammered at the far end of the studio. He had surveyed the frescoes and the furniture and his leery eyes had grown even more leery. He surveyed La Belle France. Some woman—this, slightly on the stout side, but—coo—something nice and solid and crumbly to get hold of. The carpenter was not a spiritual soul. Was Medworth wondering why the French dame bossed the place? No need for such queries. Wasn't it obvious? The French dame had Mr. Tryte in her pocket, or rather—in her bed.

So, over his nightly beer in the Crown bar, the carpenter winked and leered and told his tale. It spread. It ran round corners and into most unlikely places, even into the rectory. It arrived at "Tanwood" through the mouth of Sir Everard's chauffeur. It reached Sir Everard himself, and caused him to remark: "Well, what would you expect?"

In these enlightened days daughters do not accept ethical direction from their fathers, but Sir Everard did feel justified in hinting to Rowena that Stallards was no haunt for maidens. And why?

"Oh, well, you can take it from me, my dear."

"Dear old thing, do you think Little Blondie could ever put me in peril?"

Sir Everard was Old School Tie and rightly so. Those who mock at Old School Tie do so because its blessings have never fallen upon them.

"Wrong atmosphere, Ro. Keep out of it. Don't like tarnish."

"Does Blondie keep a——"

"Tut-tut. Enough said."

"Right-o. Is it the housekeeper?"

Now—really, the young can be frightening!

"Not our business to——"

"Well, she's a good stalwart Juno. Rather cat and mouse idea, I should say."

Her father was both shocked and impressed. Damn it, the young did see into things sometimes. That French dame was rather like a large, black, watchful cat.

Playing golf with Samson, Sir Everard mentioned the subject.

"Gossip has it, Sam, that that fellow Tryte and his housekeeper——"

Samson fozzled a shot, and compressed his lips.

"What, Madame Bertrand?"

"Yes."

"Don't believe it. She just makes him comfortable. Most efficient woman."

Sir Everard stroked his nose.

"Sorry I made you fozzle. Cut it out and take another pot. Well, I don't know. Comfortable is as comfortable does."

Samson braced himself and played a perfect mashie shot to the seventh green.

"Damn you, Sam, you are too good with that mashie of yours. I suppose Tryte is the sort of man whom people——"

"The idle love to tar and feather," said the sailor.

Mr. Samuel Stubbs, provoked by the passing of his perquisites, and by his wife's sour scorn, determined to appeal to Caesar.

"Call yourself a man," said she, "and let yourself be frightened by a foreigner—bitch!" Mrs. Stubbs did use that word—"Well, if I were in your trousers I'd 'ave it out with 'im."

Stubbs, previous to the handing over of the keys, had established a nice understanding with one of the Medford shops. Grapes, peaches, nectarines, pears, tomatoes, were to be smuggled into the greengrocer's van at the back gate, but not too near the

back gate. The other fellows—of course—would have to be silenced with a minor share of the proceeds, though so natural a conspiracy against the Boss might be regarded as normal. The chap could not eat all the fruit, and why should the wenches in the staff-room grow fat on it?

Stubbs had done some careful scouting. That darned French dame came down regularly about six on a tour of inspection. She went through all the houses, and from the time she spent in them Stubbs was sure that she counted every peach. Moreover, he did surprise her sampling the fruit, and that seemed to offer him his opportunity.

Stubbs was a sly and a servile beast. He had just escaped being shot by one of his unit's officers in the Great War for conducting a minor retreat in the face of the enemy. Held up at the point of a revolver and fiercely challenged he had whined—"The Germans are coming, sir. Big counter-attack." And the officer had said—"What the devil are you here for? Get back, you swine." So, Stubbs waited for his opportunity, when Maxwell Tryte was about to take a plunge into the bathing-pool.

"May I 'ave a word with you, sir?"

Max stood with a towel over his shoulders, for the summer day had an English chilliness.

"What is it, Stubbs?"

Stubbs chose the part of the wronged and injured soul.

"I don't like to complain, sir, but if I'm not trusted—I can't put m'heart into the job."

"Who is not trusting you, Stubbs?"

"Well, it's like this, sir. Your 'ousekeeper she's took the glass-house keys. And you see, 'ow can I be responsible for th' fruit?"

"Oh, all right, Stubbs, I'll speak to her about it."

"If I be'nt trusted, sir, I'd rather leave."

"Yes, yes, Stubbs."

And Max dropped the towel, and brought the interview to an end by taking a plunge.

Injured innocence, what! Maxwell Tryte was not quite the easy fool fellows like Stubbs might think him. The vulgar mind

can be so complacently cunning. Max took up the matter with Madame Bertrand after lunch.

"Oh, Josephine, Stubbs appears to have a grievance."

She stood before him, solid and calm.

"Of course, monsieur. I took the keys from him."

"Why?"

"That monsieur should not be robbed."

Tryte smiled. Oh, La Belle France, so careful and determined, and keeping its men folk in order!

"Do you think that Stubbs——?"

"I look at Stubbs, and I know. Observe his eyes, monsieur, the eyes of a cunning dog."

Tryte laughed.

"Your eyes don't miss much, Josephine."

"I use them in monsieur's service."

"But Stubbs says he may leave us."

"Would the heavens fall, monsieur?"

"Hardly. I think we will leave the keys with you, Josephine."

"Thank you, monsieur."

When Samuel Stubbs was told that the keys were to remain with Madame Bertrand, he looked a very injured man, but he did not give notice. There were other pickings which it was not possible for the French dame to control, adventures among the raspberry canes, secret visits to the plums. Stubbs's surreptitious perquisities were spiced with spite, and there was poison under his tongue.

"Yes, if the Boss is scared of her—one don't 'ave to dig deep for why."

Mrs. Stubbs played echo.

"Disgustin' I call it. Carrying on with a servant, and she a furriner."

Meanwhile, Max's new picture progressed. La Belle France of the history books and of Swinburne was present in the person of Josephine Bertrand, but the France in the mirror was ultra-Paris, or St. Martin in the sex season. It was a sinister and a macabre production, with leering eyes, and a painted, hag-like grin. The cheeks were hollow, the lips blood red, and broken

teeth were visible between them. In one clawlike hand Madame La France clutched a thousand franc note, in the other a bottle of absinthe.

Madame Bertrand sat and watched the abomination grow. She did not remark upon it, though she was not without secret anger. Yes, but this was just the Maestro pulling a grimace. The portrait of the actual Josephine was more than kind to her. The other——? Well, did it matter?

It was Tryte who asked the ultimate question.

"Any reaction, Josephine?"

"Reaction, monsieur?"

"Yes. What do you see in the mirror?"

She gazed steadfastly at the thing.

"Is it—what—monsieur sees—in me?"

He laughed, and flourished his brush.

"God forbid! You are what France was and should be. The other——"

"Do you see France like that, monsieur?"

"Sometimes. Rather a pity, isn't it?"

"I do not see my country like that."

"No, my dear," said he, "you wouldn't."

For Madame was a Provençal, and not Paris, and though Maxwell Tryte was a play-boy he had imagination and a flair for the age-spirit and the soul of a city and a people. The smell of Paris was that of a painted and syphilitic harlot, scented to the eyebrows. These French had no standards. More money, less work, pleasure, a hedonistic curtain drawn across the future. What would the back-cloth be like when the curtain went up? Tryte shrugged his shoulders. And was England any better? Captain Valentine Samson might have been surprised by Maxwell Tryte's sensing of possible catastrophes, and by the implications of his laughing cynicism. Appeasement, safety first, Ramsay MacDonald and Stanley B. Peace pledges, and motor-cars for the million, the Army a farce, the Navy a batch of old barges.

But Tryte's puckishness did not end here. Why not complete the democratic alliance, and show England in the mirror? And how? Where was the model? By Gemini why not the sour-faced Stubbs? Picture of a worker at work! Demos confronts Utopia!

Samuel Stubbs was a very surprised man when Maxwell Tryte offered him a special fee to sit as his model. What was the great idea? There must be a catch somewhere. Stubbs was both flattered and suspicious. But, posed in an armchair, with his feet on another chair, three bottles of beer beside him, and a glass in one hand and the *Daily Herald* in the other, he began to feel in clover. He was allowed to drink the beer; he was encouraged to drink the beer until his sly face was sufficiently red and smeared with alcoholic smugness.

Mr. Stubbs in the mirror was not very different from the Stubbs in the armchair, only just a little more so. On the paper he held was painted in red letters—"Everything for everybody. Damn the Boss! I want his bank account; not a ruddy halo. And I know everything. No one can put me right."

Mr. Stubbs rather approved of that caption, though he did not say so. This was a nice easy way of earning money. Beer, beer, and cushions, and your feet on a chair. He felt—somehow—that he was getting level with that French Dame.

Tryte christened the picture—"An English Worker Confronts the Future."

He was pleased with it. The thing was damned clever.

Captain Samson, walking over to "Stallards" to improve his wit by patter with the play-boy, found Maxwell Tryte sunbathing on the terrace.

"Hallo, Nelson, come and squat."

Samson sat down on the top of the stone balustrade, and laid his hat beside him. "Quite a good pose," thought Tryte, only to realize that this man did not pose. Rather refreshing after the angular crowd.

"Have a drink, sir."

"As a matter of fact I would like a beer."

"Good English idea. Keep drinks in the studio. Let's go."

Two or three bottles of Stubbs's Ale remained to be consumed, and Tryte took the sailor to his workshop. The two pictures were there, confronting each other, and Tryte, standing by a cocktail cabinet, waved a soft and pink hand.

"Have a look-see. Like a verdict."

And Samson looked, not merely with the eyes of a sailor, but of a man who had knocked about the world, and had keen inward sight and a shrewd philosophy of his own. He looked at the pictures, and perhaps they startled him, just because certain significances shouted at a man who was not happy with the mood of the world as he saw it. Damned clever! And decadent. No, not decadent, but a very brilliant caricaturing of social tendencies.

"Well," said Tryte, pouring out beer, "any reactions?"

"They are damned clever, Tryte."

"And damnable?"

"No. I should call them damning, and to my way of seeing things rather terribly true."

Tryte gave a little laugh, and carried Samson his beer.

"Almost—then—I'm a moralist."

The sailor looked at him with sudden steadfastness.

"Yes, you might be. Almost a Hogarth."

"Oh, my dear sir!"

"Might call it—placarding—the damned silly slush of democracy's pig-trough."

"I say, sir, that's some phrase. Worth noting. Not going totalitarian, are you?"

"No," said Samson with sudden grimness, "discipline as against social slush. You might be—of use—you know, Tryte."

"The prophetic painter of placards!"

"Yes. Just that."

X

"WALLS OF JERICHO" had proved a failure, that is to say according to the Tryte standard. If Mr. Mellaby was disappointed with the sales, he could rub his hands and remark:

"I told you so," and console himself with the returns of his new best-seller. America too was not liking the book, and though the Germans accepted it, it was because it made fun of the English.

In brief, men who were jealous of Tryte accepted the chance of kicking him, when kicking was in favour, and one particularly venomous attack appeared in one of the illustrated weeklies. It contained a caricature of Maxwell Tryte, exhibiting him as a fat, bearded, cock-sparrow, with a paint brush under one wing, and a quill under the other.

Captain Samson, having spent the day hoeing with Will amid the trees, and picking "Beauty of Bath," felt moved towards social things. This simple life was suiting him. Pity there was not more of it, more of Will Spray and his blue-eyed steadfastness and solid joy in the job. There had been days when England had been much more Will Spray, men of the sea, and men of the fields. Factory life seemed to Samson a bastard growth, but what were you going to do about it?

At the iron gates of Tanwood and in the shade of the beeches he paused to look with profound pleasure at this so-English domain. Rowena called it a Jane Austen scene, and so it was, in period and in atmosphere. The sloping lawns and parkland between the high shade of the woods were smoothed with sunlight. Specimen trees, and splendid in their maturity, cedars, sequoias, beeches, chestnuts, threw long shadows across the green valley. The white house with its French windows and white shutters, and green veranda, sat like a swan on its nest. There were brilliant beds of pelargonium set in the front lawn. Sir Everard liked geraniums. He said: "They make me think of my mother and my kid's days. And why not?"

Valentine Samson was frowning, not at this sweet place, but at a sudden horrid forefeeling of unhappy things, a shadow out of the future. As a sailor, Samson had been fey. It had been said of him "The Old Man's got magic, and a touch." He had. More than once, when in action, he had so handled his ship that enemy shells and torpedoes had been fooled. He had seemed to divine danger and counter it intuitively. Other less enlightened men had said—"Old Sam has the devil's own luck."

Now, standing by these stately gates and under the shade of

the trees he had one of these visionary moments. What of another war, and this island utterly unprepared for it? What, if in its blind cult of pleasure this England went down in disaster, and strutting louts in coal-scuttle helmets should trample over such a place as this?

"Damn it, don't be hysterical."

He might say this to himself, but that uncomfortable feeling was there. England down in the dust and being booted and ravished by those Teutonic cads. For, to Samson the sailor, the German had been and always would be a cad.

He walked on, down the sloping, curving road. He saw a figure in a deck chair in the shade of the veranda, Rowena with a magazine. Rowena! An English girl, to be raped like the island she lived in! Samson's lips were hard and sharp, his eyes fierce. But why think of such things?

"Hullo, Uncle."

"Hallo, my dear. Your father in?"

"Down at the farm. Won't I do?"

"Excellently. Looking at the pretty pictures?"

"No so pretty—always."

Samson sat down in a vacant chair.

"And why not?"

"Rather raffish and futile, sometimes. But I was reading something that made me chortle."

"What?"

"An article on Blondie and his latest book. Pretty scarifying. Like to read it?"

"I should."

She passed him the magazine, and observed him while he read the ridicule that was poured upon Tryte's unblemished head. The article was unsigned, but its author was Mr. Harold Catchpole, who, with a reputation that was unpleasantly septic, accused Maxwell Tryte of literary perversions. There were no flies upon Rowena, and her essential cleanliness was not mere innocence, but the product of a fastidious self that took a bath daily. She looked at Uncle Val, so intent, and so clear cut, taut and slim as a lad, with brown hands and austere lips. Some man—this! He must have been a looker in his prime; he still was a

looker, but with courage and integrity and shrewdness bitten into him by the salt sea. If Rowena dreamed of matrimony, and she did not do so much, a Valentine Samson might be the sort of man who would make her go all sugar and cream.

Captain Samson folded up the magazine and laid it with an air of careful contempt upon a garden table.

"Spiteful effort, and not—justified."

Rowena sat up and took notice.

"Gosh, Uncle, you've not gone Blondie?"

He smiled at her obliquely.

"Did the Arcadian nymphs talk slang? Strange, that from the lips of fair women——"

"Oh, go along, old thing! You don't mean to tell me——"

He answered her deliberately.

"There is more in Maxwell Tryte than the village maidens see. If he were to set course in the right direction—he would be more than a buccaneer."

"And how?"

"Do you think this is the best of all possible worlds?"

Her young forehead showed a frown.

"Well, no. It's a bit lousy in some ways. Gone ga-ga about games and what-not."

"Quite so. Damned soft and silly, and worse. That's where a man like Tryte might serve, scarify sottishness, and hold up a mirror to modern man."

Rowena sat up.

"That little clown?"

"Yes, that little clown, as you call him. He's got vision, though it may have been the wrong sort of vision. He could show us a mirror in which things could shock the silliness out of our self-loving little souls."

"Do you call yourself little, Uncle?"

"I am just an obscure, pensioned-off sailor, but I'm not quite blind yet. I've just seen two of Tryte's latest pictures. They scared the soul out of me."

"Good Lord," said she, "they must be——"

"Somehow—furiously prophetic to those who don't wear rose-coloured spectacles."

"Does anyone?"

"My dear, this country is going about wearing glasses of that sort."

Jeremiahs were not popular in those halcyon days. The public preferred the prophets of peace, plenty and pleasure, especially plenty of pleasure. Silly women ran about cackling after dropping peace-pledge eggs in nicely strawed nests. Anyone who suggested that the world was not yet ripe for universal peace was howled down as a war-monger. Moneyed gentlemen wished to retain their property; Labour was suspicious and parochially minded. Mosley and his crowd? Fascism, a conspiracy to put Demos in blinkers. Conscription? No, thank you. Free men would not suffer that sort of slavery. Oxford voted against fighting for its country. "Moral Rearmament" ran about posted on the back windows of motor-cars. Yes, Demos was in blinkers, without knowing it. The insufferable Ribbentrop, foisted upon England, diagnosed decadence.

But it is possible that some of the young were more open of eye than their elders. They spoke of a frustrated world, and divined in the future vague cataclysm, Revolution, Russia, the world gone red. That it was to go blood-red in a yet more tragic way was foreseen only by the few.

Whether it was that an old sailor's words had fructified the spirit of a girl, or whether Rowena had Cassandra within her, the fact remains that she was moved by a spirit of unrest. Was hitting a ball—everything, or winning the Grand at Henley?—though Henley might be the most clean and virile illustration of the English scene. What about those pictures of Maxwell Tryte's? Blondie might be hopeless on the tennis-court, but—maybe—he had vision.

Mr. Montefiore of the Greta Galleries, invited by Max to a private inspection, came, saw, and rubbed his Hebraic nose.

"Vewy clever, my dear Max, vewy clever, but who is going to buy them?"

"No likee?"

Mr. Montefiore spread his hands.

"I show them—if you wish, but as you say—no likee. And

why—this thusness? An artist may be clever, but he must not be—moralist.”

“So you see a moral in them?”

“My dear friend, they explode with morality. They make wicked fun of our dear good world. Was not that your intention?”

“I paint what I see.”

Mr. Montefiore prodded Max’s tummy with a fat forefinger.

“Certain things it is not tactful to see. Shut Eye is more popular than Pop Eye.”

“Supposing I am bored with being popular?”

Mr. Montefiore shrugged.

“If you wish to go to the cemetery, try to tell the world the truth. Emulate our dear Prime Minister. Go on being the naughty, amusing Max.”

“Those pictures don’t amuse you?”

“Dear sir, they scarify.”

“Not exactly Gretna Green.”

“My gallery, Max, has to make a profit. Yes, though I am an artist, and like to show original art. If you would be advised, keep those pictures in your studio. All right for a private show. Oh, quite.”

Maxwell Tryte laughed, but there was an edge to his laughter.

“Good old Monte. I won’t embarrass you. If I choose to show them—on my own, that’s my cemetery. After all, we are living in a kind of cemetery, squatting on graves and drinking absinthe out of skull-tops.”

Again Mr. Montefiore shrugged.

“I think you need a holiday.”

“Why not suggest my falling in love?”

“A very good suggestion too,” said Mr. Montefiore.

Rowena was wearing her set all, five games all face when she took out the Morris, and drove to “Stallards.” What was the great idea, or rather—the adventure? She was going to see those pictures of Maxwell Tryte’s. She would beard Blondie in his studio, and explore the mystery of the real man.

Her father would not approve. Did fathers ever approve?

Did it matter if fathers approved? And, after all, Uncle Sam was responsible for her sudden interest in art. Rowena was not arty, but she could be a very intense young woman when that strenuous, dark self within her was moved to go crusading. She might salute Joan of Arc, if she did not care a damn for pictorial representations of the Heroine.

Yet, strange to say, a sudden absurd shyness seized her when she pulled the Morris up outside the porch of Stallards. Was she being bold and cheap? Would the fellow think——? No, damn him, he had better not. She was not interested in Blondie, but in Blondie's pictorial significance.

"Go on in. Don't be a herb."

She was in the act of opening the door when the final decision was made for her by Maxwell Tryte appearing in the porch.

"Miss Ravenstock. How very charming."

Charming? Damn charm! She became her most abrupt and darkling self.

"Excuse me blowing up like this. You may think it cheek."

"I think it—rather pleasant."

She whisked out of the car.

"Fact is—Uncle Sam was telling me about some pictures of yours. No, I'm not picture-minded. But might I have a squint at them?"

Tryte smiled at her, but it was a smile with reservations. He too, like Valentine Samson, thought that the lady's language did not conform to the dignity of Diana. Rather a pity! Here was a girl who looked like a Shakespeare heroine, and might have spoken in blank verse, whereas she must needs fall in with her generation and describe ennuiant things as lousy.

"I am very much obliged to Captain Samson. Please come in."

She looked at him, head up, half defiantly.

"Thanks. I suppose you get lots of fan-fools messing around."

"Yes," said he, "I do. But there are differences."

So, Maxwell Tryte led her to his studio, and found himself, much to his own surprise, inwardly apologizing for the nudities upon the walls. Would she be shocked by them? Well, well, well, the great Max suddenly shy of his own naked naughtiness!

Those two provocative pictures stood confronting each other by the north window. Tryte had collected a cigarette box, and he held it open before Rowena.

"Smoke, Miss Ravenstock?"

She was looking about her somewhat like a grown child in a new nursery. She was not shocked by the frescoes upon the walls. They just did not please her. Maybe, she would have called them cheap.

"Thanks, I will."

She took a cigarette, and he struck a match for her, and held the flame to the paper tube. He had been hotly aware of her sweeping glance at the studio walls. It seemed to pass over them like a ray of cold sunlight and leave them unpraised in appropriate shadow.

He heard himself speaking.

"Nursery stuff, I'm afraid."

She gave him a cool glance.

"Would you call it that?"

He laughed.

"Right verdict. I'm going to paint them out. Flowers would be better."

"Do you ever paint flowers?"

"I might."

Was the implication obvious to him, and did he wince? And did he divine the clean and essential fastidiousness that was concealed behind casualness and slang?

He, too, lit a cigarette.

"These are Captain Samson's pictures. Great man, Samson."

She gave him a curious look.

"Rather so."

"Something of a symbol. Well, won't you look."

He stood aside while she confronted those pictures. There was silence, and to Tryte the silence was brittle and disturbing. He felt that in looking at his work she was looking with youth's merciless eyes at him. Head up, cigarette between two slim fingers, she stood appraising the two pictures. Maxwell Tryte was a brilliant colourist, but Rowena was not interested in their colouring. She was trying to see what Uncle Sam had seen, and

to divine the depth or shallows of Tryte's work. What was its significance? It must have profound significance if it had so impressed Valentine Samson.

The silence continued. It had a strangely disturbing effect upon Maxwell Tryte. It was this tall, dark child who seemed at ease, while he—the wit and cynical worldling—felt jumpy and self-conscious.

"I'm prepared for criticism."

Her silence continued.

"I may as well tell you that the great Montefiore of the 'Gretna Galleries' won't show them."

"Afraid I have never heard of him."

"Nor visited Gretna!"

"No."

The joke struck him as particularly feeble. She—might go to Gretna, but it would need some—man—to persuade her into such an adventure.

"Who is the French woman?"

The question startled him.

"Oh, just my housekeeper."

"And what did she think of the other France?"

"Would not see it—like that. Her France isn't."

"That's Paris, I suppose?"

"Yes, or St. Martin—in certain phases."

She stood serious and still, her cigarette forgotten, and shedding ash upon one of Tryte's Persian rugs.

"And who is the unpleasant old beast in the chair?"

"My head gardener. Name of Samuel Stubbs."

"Well, I'd sack him."

"That's just what I want to do."

"Well, why don't you?"

"I was speaking figuratively. Samuel Stubbs is a symbol."

"Of England?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

She stood dark and still. Tryte, watching her, felt strange stirrings in him. Somehow she had become Elizabethan.

"Do you think England is like that?"

"Some of it. Too much of it."

She was silent for some seconds. Then she said: "Thank you, Mr. Tryte. I think you ought to show those pictures."

XI

MADAME BERTRAND had been powdering her very fine white arms and her most opulent breasts, for the Maestro was peculiarly sensitive to smells, human and otherwise, and Madame studied every foible. She could remember having to discharge a maid because the girl had suffered from odorous feet. Even the perfume of certain flowers appeared to be displeasing to Genius. Madame Bertrand might be a white tuberose, and though she had never decorated the Maestro's holy of holies, she perfected her personal perfume. She was at her window, fastening up a flowery frock when the little blue car arrived at Stallards. Madame had taken cover behind a curtain. That haughty young mam'selle! And had Mr. Tryte invited her?

His gaillard greeting of Miss Ravenstock did not please madame. She could not quite catch what was said, but she chose to wear soft slippers, and going below, stood listening. Yes, they were in the studio, and alone together. In France that might mean more than in England. Madame Bertrand glided softly down the passage to the studio door.

She listened. Suspicious and hostile she might be, but the conversation did not suggest romantic intimacy. They appeared to be discussing Mr. Tryte's pictures.

Madame did not divine the finality of the last sentence.

"I think you ought to show those pictures."

Almost she was caught on the wrong foot, but at the last moment she remembered to knock, just half a second before the door opened.

It was Maxwell Tryte who opened the door, and beside him stood the dark girl with aloofness in her eyes.

"Oh, par-don," said Josephine Bertrand, "I came to see if monsieur——"

Maxwell Tryte looked hard at Madame. It seemed that he was not pleased. Meanwhile, Madame stood aside, and the girl swept past her without looking at the French woman. Madame Bertrand might not have been there, and she was very much there in her passions and her prejudices.

Tryte followed Miss Ravenstock. Madame heard him say: "Won't you let me give you tea?"

"Thanks—so much, but—we have people coming to tennis."

"Well, thank you for coming, and your verdict. I will show those pictures."

Madame Bertrand hesitated. Being woman she had not missed the displeasure in the Maestro's eyes, that "What the devil are you doing here" look. Diplomacy, diplomacy! Maxwell Tryte had gone out to speed Miss Ravenstock, though he had no wish to see her depart so swiftly. He would have opened the car door for her, but Rowena opened her own doors.

"Thank you again for coming."

"Oh, that's all right. Good of you to let me see the pictures."

Rowena pressed the starter button, got into reverse gear, and took off the brake.

"Plenty of room."

She needed no guidance from man, and the little Morris was her dutiful slave. Max stood aside. He raised a hand.

"Vale. But may I say Au revoir?"

She gave him a quick, brittle smile, nodded, and drove off.

Maxwell Tryte watched the car disappear down the steep curve of the drive. Capable young huntress—this, with the new moon in her hair. Comely creature. Oh, yes, much more than that. Wild and provocative in a way that was new to Maxwell Tryte. He turned into the house, and walked down the passage to the studio with eyes that sentimentalists might have described as "Dreamy," and in the studio he found Josephine Bertrand shaking up the cushions of the divan and the armchairs.

It was not a tactful occupation, and to Tryte suddenly suggesting that Madame assumed that cushions had been troubled.

Drat the woman! This had been no cushion occasion, and Madame's fussing was irritating and superfluous.

"All right, Josephine, you can leave the cushions. I am going to work."

"Bien, monsieur."

Instantly she was honey and milk to him. The maestro was feeling temperamental, and had to be humoured. She glided solidly but noiselessly towards the door.

"Will monsieur take tea here—or——"

"Put it in the loggia."

"Bien, monsieur."

She passed out, but not before Maxwell Tryte had noticed something about her. Slippers. Why—slippers? Had she come on muffled feet to listen at the studio door?"

Well, damn her, anyway! These French women were apt to be too bossy and interfering. Who was it had said—oh, yes old Samson—"Never marry a French woman, my lad. She'll pester you for sex satisfaction every hour of the day and night, when you are with book, when you want nothing but a pipe, when you are cleaning your teeth." Pithy person—old Samson. Tryte was feeling that Josephine Bertrand might become too large and solid and overpowering. Did she imagine herself to be indispensable? That sort of tyranny had to be scotched.

Moreover, Maxwell Tryte was big with impulse. The creative mood was on him, or rather sudden passion to express a young girl in form and colour. His tea was placed in the loggia, but he forgot all about it. He had a canvas on his easel and was registering with concentrated impetuosity an impression of a young Diana with the new moon in her hair.

When Maxwell Tryte had painted that picture, the virtue seemed to go out of him. It was as though he had expressed some ultimate thing, and had nothing left for the moment to say.

For the picture completed a trio. It was Rowena Ravenstock and yet not Rowena, in that she materialized as a type rather than as a person. It showed a young girl sitting in the front row of the players' seats at Wimbledon, elbows on knees, chin cupped in her hands, looking down upon the centre court in which two young men were playing singles. Tryte showed the

oval of the great enclosure as a smudge of faces, egg beside egg, open mouthed, bun-eyed. The young men playing had brilliant golden hair, but their faces were also mere smudges. So, the girl sat and gazed with frowning forehead, and fiercely dark and questioning eyes.

Tryte painted his label.

"Young England Looks at An Ormolu World."

He took ten days over that picture. The technique was brilliant. Somehow he had managed to concentrate an impression of the vastness of the place—the multitude—the shelf upon shelf of foolish faces—into that canvas. For, to the furious vision of the creative artist the faces were fool faces, mere anonymous smudges, bladders of lard hung in a butcher's shop. Two young parasites with golden hair, knocking a ball to and fro, while thousands of silly women gaped and held their breath. What if a bomb were to drop on that carpet of turf?

So, the last touch was revealed to him, and he added it, a large, brutal face under a steel helmet, set like a red sun in the sky above the far shadow-belt.

"Bloody Mars Looks at England."

Valentine Samson was the first man to see that picture, Madame Bertrand the first woman. For ten days Tryte had kept the studio locked, until Madame's curiosity compelled her to remind the Maestro that even studios needed cleaning. So, Josephine Bertrand saw Rowena as young England, for though Tryte's visual memory had had to serve as his model, Young England was very recognizable as Rowena. Madame Bertrand stood and stared at the thing with pale, black-eyed hostility. There was no mirror here, no macabre transformation of the model. Young England was Young England, gazing Casandalike upon the golden headed play-boys, and surrounded by that frieze of smudged faces. Madame Bertrand's hands were clenched, her nostrils pinched, her forehead more than ruffled. She would like to have taken a knife and hacked the picture into ribbons, for, if Maxwell Tryte was falling in love with Young England, that other world, as St. Martin expressed it, might become less than reality. Almost, Josephine Bertrand hissed at

and spat upon that picture. It was a placard warning her that her planned and ultimate possession of property and a person might be nullified by a young wench with the new moon in her hair.

But she would have her remedy, oh—yes. If Maxwell Tryte was moved to make a serious fool of himself over a young English Miss, there could be revelations that would be destructive of any romance. What of Monsieur's many "Rosalies." What of Madame herself? She could say, though it was not yet true, "I have slept with Monsieur. Do you wish to marry that sort of man?"

Captain Samson also could claim a private view of the picture. Strolling across to Stallards, he was told by the maid that Mr. Tryte was in London for the day, and if the girl had not the sense to suggest a rest and tea, Madame Bertrand arrived in time to repair the lapse.

"Oh, Monsieur le Capitaine, I am so sorry—Mr. Tryte is in London. Will you not come in and rest?"

"Thanks, madame, I will. "

"Will it be tea, monsieur, or whisky-soda?"

"Tea—please, and thank you."

"Perhaps monsieur would like it in the studio. Mr. Tryte's pictures are so interesting."

Captain Samson walked into the studio, to be instantly confronted by Rowena as "Young England." The picture had pride of place, with La Belle France to the left, and Mr. Samuel Stubbs on the right. So, Tryte had been busy, astonishingly busy! The old sailor stood off, and head up, and with narrowed eyes, accepted the challenge of that picture. Damned clever, but more than clever. It was the centre-piece in the triptych, and seemed to give the lie to the cynicism and coarse and belching complacency of the other two. By Horatio Nelson, had Maxwell Tryte seen the light, or the signal flying from the masthead? England Expects! But Rowena. Why Rowena? Had she sat for that part to little Blondie, and if so—had she divined the picture's and her own significance? The future is with Youth, and what will Youth make of it? Samson walked closer, drew back again, shaded his eyes with a hand. Assuredly Maxwell

Tryte had chosen well, for what could be more prophetic of a new England than the slim and intent figure of this almost grim young girl whose very loveliness had the gleam of untainted marble.

Samson was still at gaze when Madame herself honoured him by bringing in the tea-tray.

"Monsieur finds the picture interesting?"

Samson turned sharply.

"I do."

"That is what you call—the Wimbledon."

"It is, madame."

Josephine Bertrand set the tray down on a table.

"Monsieur Tryte—he is—a genius, monsieur, is he not? He sees—things—in a mirror."

Samson moved towards the table.

"He does, madame. Tell me, did Miss Ravenstock sit for the picture?"

Josephine Bertrand's smile was larded ice.

"No, monsieur, I think not. When Monsieur Tryte sees—he remembers. Besides——"

"Yes, madame?"

"Monsieur Tryte has been—interested—in so many women. It is the temperament—artistic—is it not?"

Samson sat down at the table with his battle-face in action.

"Possibly, madame, possibly, but it is not our business."

Madame Bertrand's face went dead. She had been snubbed, and she knew it, but strange to say she bore no malice towards a man who had treated her like some impertinent and presuming warrant-officer. Moreover, she had contrived to plant her seed in what might be fertile soil, for this curt and handsome sailor was Maxwell Tryte's one disinterested friend.

Valentine Samson enjoyed his tea, and a further contemplation of those three pictures. Wimbledon! Yes, what a show, what a symbol of mass insanity. Women rising at three in the morning to stand in queues; women crowding outside the holy of holies to get a glimpse of some oiled hero of the tennis bat, and perhaps to plead for an autograph. How damned silly, and how utterly out of proportion! And if war came to this island how would

a soft and pleasure-loving population behave? Had the old country the guts of the island that had defied Napoleon?

Then, the unexpected happened. Captain Samson had poured himself out a third cup of tea and was filling a pipe, when the door opened and Maxwell Tryte walked in. Samson had one glimpse of Tryte's face, the face of a man who was bored and unhappy, before it lit up with a pleasure that was actual.

"Hallo, Uncle. May I use the term?"

"If you like. They told me——"

"Yes, went up to town. Depressing place—London—sometimes. Makes you feel like a jumping flea with nothing worthwhile to bite."

"So you came back early."

"I did. Feel like a drink, much drink."

He glanced at the tea-tray.

"Auntie's downfall or grandma's delight."

Samson struck a match and lit his pipe.

"Why run to drink, my lad, when you can paint pictures like that?"

Tryte had turned to the studio's cocktail cabinet. For a moment he stood still, with a kind of startled rigidity, head up, shoulders tense. Then he turned slowly and looked down at Samson.

"Are they worth while? Is anything worth while?"

"Don't be silly," said Samson. "My pipe's worth while, so long as I don't over-smoke. Haven't you discovered, Max, that the art of life lies in holding back."

Tryte walked towards the three pictures and gazed at them, particularly at the centre piece.

"Tummies in, what?"

"Exactly. That last picture strikes me as being the best of the three."

"Think so?"

"Yes, because it's not a blotch of cynicism, and shows soul."

Tryte laughed.

"Soul? I thought the thing was obsolete."

"Depends what you mean by it. Call it steersmanship. Fact is, Max, you are floundering, and you needn't flounder."

Tryte turned and sat down on the divan, and suddenly his head went down between his hands.

"Oh, damn it, Uncle, I feel finished, empty. It came over me when I painted—her. Somehow, I feel like a rotten, grimacing idiot."

Samson pulled hard at his pipe.

"Good sign, perhaps. Interlude between the seasons. I've felt like that myself."

Tryte's head came up.

"You?"

"Yes, a sort of homeless mariner, soused in seaweed. Bad to feel like that. Sinning against one's immortal soul. Well, you've painted three damned significant pictures. Why not take a holiday on that, and come and help me pick fruit?"

"Pick fruit?"

"Yes, a good job, a lovely job in its way. Fruits of the earth, my lad, not mere Gin and It, and frousy females. Even young Rowena might teach you a thing or two."

Tryte's eyes lit up.

"By God, I believe she could teach me—everything. Not her job—though. I'm getting fortyish, and fat."

The sailor grinned at him.

"No need to be either. What is forty? What you feel, and fat——? You could knock that fat off in a month."

Said Tryte: "I might try."

XII

THE fact seems hardly credible, but in these enlightened days "Maythorn" had no telephone. More incredible still Captain Valentine Samson managed to exist without a telephone. Actually, he disliked telephones. They could present the

jabbering world with just another chance to fuss you, and get you out of a chair when you were happy with pipe and book. Will Spray was not telephonic. Here was a man who—in all his life—had never spoken into one of the nasty black contraptions.

As for Mrs. Tribute she did regret the absence of a telephone. It was such an easy way to get hold of the butcher when he had forgotten to send your Sunday joint. Also, you could be pithy and sarcastic on the telephone if you were feeling like that.

"Don't you think we ought to have the telephone, sir?"

"Get thee behind me, Satan."

"Oh, sir!"

"Not you, Mrs. Tribute. There is more of the devil in all our gadgets than the world wots of. What is the trouble?"

"The butcher again, sir."

"Drat the fellow. Change your butcher."

"There are only two in Medworth, sir."

"And are both equally inefficient? We shall have to become vegetarians, Mrs. Tribute."

"I'd better take the bus in, sir."

"I'll write you a message to the butcher, something that may stimulate him."

Strange to say, and surprising to himself, was the discovery that he had lost the art of being bored. The dreadful ennui of old age might never be his, perhaps because he had a head-piece and adaptability. There had been moments when he had wondered whether Maythorn might fail to satisfy a spirit that had sailed all over the world, but Maythorn had taken him into her lap, a very flowery lap. Valentine Samson found himself doing simple things with extraordinary contentment, and becoming excited about absurd and primitive happenings. Fruit to pick, weeds to kill, a wasps' nest to be located and treated with cyanide, the problem of Brown Rot pondered. He appeared to be becoming the happy simpleton like Will Spray. Was Will Spray ever bored?

He asked Will that question.

"Ever bored, Will?"

"What be that, sir?"

Fancy a man who knew not boredom!

"Well, getting tired of doing the same thing day in—day out."

Will looked at him open-eyed.

"Why—no, sir. It be my life. I may get tired sometimes, but a pipe and a mug o' beer and a good sleep sees to that."

"Lucky man, Will."

"Well, sir, there be so many jobs to do on the land. And they be different. I don't say as I don't get a bit tetchy sometimes with wasps and emmets and caterpillars."

"And late frosts, Will."

"Well, that be but nature."

So, Valentine Samson laboured with head and hands, learning the many crafts, and finding strange peace in them. The sea was a restless medium, this Sussex landscape steadfast and consoling. He had his books. He read scientific stuff which Will had never heard of. What were chromasomes and diploids and triploids to Will? Yet, Will was a master of craft and had eyes like a hawk's. With a Dutch hoe in your hands, or a picking basket on the ladder, life had a peaceful rhythm. You felt yourself to be with God in a garden.

Sir Everard rubbed his prodigious nose and wondered. He too was a countryman, but differently so. How long would old Sam stick it? What of the winter, and muck, and shabby skies, and the long dark nights, and loneliness? Sir Everard was a sociable soul. He did not quite understand that some men, as they grow older, grow fonder of being alone.

One thing was obvious. It was much more difficult to drag Sam out on to the Medworth golf-course. Always he seemed to have a job to do, and to be keener on doing it than on hitting a ball.

"You'll get fed up, old man, if you don't play a bit."

Valentine Samson smiled at him.

"Consider the lilies of the field and Will Spray."

"What's the connection?"

"Just that the lilies of the field and Will have never played a game in all their lives. The job's the game."

Rowena, driving over to Maythorn one September morning, and setting off to hunt up Uncle Sam without consulting Mrs. Tribute, was presented with a most surprising picture, Maxwell Tryte labouring up one of the alleyways with a bushel-basket, full of red Worcester Pearmain. Blondie gone native! Well, well! Though he was almost as colourful as the apples, in dark green velveteen breeches, and a pale yellow shirt.

Tryte put the basket down. He was not sorry to put it down, for the carrying of burdens had not been his metier, nor was he facetiously playful towards Rowena. Almost he was normal man, and a little shy of the Lovely.

"Good morning. Wanting the Captain?"

"Yes."

"He's down among the things called Ellison's Orange."

But Rowena stood her ground.

"I didn't know you had——"

"Gone native. Uncle's prescription. Good for the reduction of tummies."

Rowena could not help glancing at his middle man. It did appear to have been reduced. Moreover he could make a joke against himself.

"Seems so," said she. "Gone into partnership with Uncle?"

"No, just giving a hand. Bumper crop this year."

She looked at the basket of fruit.

"How much does that weigh?"

"That monument of rustic information—Mr. William Spray—says about forty-five pounds. And he can carry two of these things, one on the top of the other. I can't."

"But you might," said she.

He saluted her.

"Thank you, Miss Optimist."

She passed on, while Maxwell Tryte recovered the basket of apples and carried on towards the fruit-house. Samson was busy among the trees, collecting rotten fruit in a bucket before burning it, and Rowena was close upon him before he knew it.

"Hallo, Uncle. Collecting—the fallen sinners?"

"Hallo, my dear. I wish some fellow would discover what to do about Brown Rot."

"Haven't they?"

"No, seem to edge off the subject. Funny people—the experts. Take Apple Saw Fly. Just been reading a monograph on the pest. But I'm boring you."

"You're not."

"Well, what would be the first thing you would ask of a learned fellow about a particular pest?"

"What it looked like."

"Exactly. And that's the very thing they don't tell you. I want to know my saw-fly when I see it."

"I bet the old Germans wouldn't fall down like that."

"Afraid you're right. Efficient cads. Well, to what do I owe——"

"Oh, the pater has a potentate for the week-end. Would you be an angel and make a four on Saturday afternoon. I'd collect you. You and I would take on the pater and old pomposity."

"That settles it. I'll play."

"Angelic of you. Say, I didn't know Blondie had taken to the soil."

"He's taking a holiday. Seen that other picture of his?"

"No. Which one?"

"You are—it, my dear."

"Mc?"

"Yes, it's the best of the bunch."

"That's rather cheeky of him. He never asked me."

Samson smiled upon her.

"Now—don't pretend that you are not pleased. Oh, vanity, thy name is woman!"

"Shut up, Uncle. I never sat for him."

"The impression must have been so vivid, my dear, that——"

"I shall have to have it out with him."

"Why? Don't you know that many women would give their tiaras or their virtue to be painted by Maxwell Tryte? You will be exhibited——"

Rowena was silent, looking down at Valentine Samson's boots. They needed cleaning.

"Yes, I know, my dear," said he, "I'll put on nice clean ones to play golf with you."

"Pax, old thing. I'm serious."

"So is the young lady in the picture."

"Am I—a——?"

"A symbolic figure? You are. Why—not——?"

But suddenly she was off, loping along on her long slim legs, and with a face of unbridled purpose. She met Maxwell Tryte returning with the empty basket, and her dark eyes held him at the pistol point.

"I hear you have put me in a picture."

"Guilty."

"Why didn't you ask my permission?"

He held the basket like a shield against his body.

"Sorry. I just had to paint that picture, and you came into it. It is you and not you."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, I had to work from memory. I'll make you an offer, Miss Ravenstock. Come, look and decide. If you give the order—I'll burn that picture."

"Burn it?"

"Yes. Is that a fair offer?"

"It is," said she.

Was it puckishness, or the fear of a man confronted with strange, deep, passionate things, or a new and hypersensitive self-consciousness that made Maxwell Tryte persuade Captain Samson to be present at this judgment? Or maybe it was the gesture of a man who knew himself to have been too easy with women, and who would accord to this young girl aloofness and dignity. There are some pictures at which you do not throw familiar slang. Shakespeare had been Catholic in his humanity, but he had not made of Ophelia or Juliet casual young wenches.

Samson smiled that little, shimmery, steel-bright smile of his.

"Want me to act as a sort of chaperone? You might be afraid of——"

"I am."

The sailor's smile died away.

"That's damned serious."

"Less so than you think. I'm not so disgustingly self-sure as people may think. I don't want her to think——"

"That you were manoeuvring for position?"

Tryte nodded.

"I'm not a very brave man, Uncle. That's why I have always strutted. Twenty-one can terrify the forties."

Samson went near and laid a hand on Tryte's shoulder.

"Funny thing—fear. Fear of a face, fear of the guns on the other ship. There was one woman in my life who put the fear of God into me."

"And——?"

"She favoured the other fellow. Let me tell you, my lad, that there can be infinite good in fear."

"Meaning?"

"That something in us has been chastened. Life has torn the make-believe from us, and we know ourselves to be naked."

Again Tryte nodded, and looked with sudden affection into Samson's eyes.

"You are a good soul-doctor, sir. I'm not devilishly afraid of wanting what I can never have."

Maxwell Tryte and his like might contend, and rightly so, that in their craftsmanship they were searching for new forms of expression. Man made language; man made love. Why not new language, new love? Tryte was familiar with the fussy fools who wrote to tell an author that he had split an infinitive, put a comma in the wrong place, or constructed a sentence most ungrammatically. Was language for man, or man for the passing pedant? The Elizabethans spelled as they please. The U.S.A. has coined a new lingo. Signs of vitality and of youth, these. The fellow who was tied to the conventions and the grammar book had the complacency of the little minded, and dry-rot in his soul.

Rowena, driving up to Stallards, found herself in a peculiar

mood, a most unfamiliar mood. Was she shy of the occasion? Was she a little fluttered and flattered, and resenting both reactions? Gosh, she was not going sloppy, not she——! She sprawled out of the car rather like a monstrous schoolgirl in blue serge uniform, straw hat and hockey stick. She would play the fat-leg, the pig-tail flapper. If Blondie imagined——

“Oh, yes, Miss,” said the maid, “Mr. Tryte expects you.”

“Righto,” said Rowena.

She was conducted decorously to the studio, to be confronted by Uncle Sam and a pipe, and Maxwell Tryte in a nicely-cut grey lounge suit. Rowena was presented with a question-mark. Why Uncle Sam, why Savile Row? An unexpected formalism appeared to dominate the occasion.

“Hallo, Uncle.”

“Hallo to you, my dear.”

She nodded at Maxwell Tryte. And then she noticed that the picture on the easel standing between the other two was covered with a Spanish shawl. Why this mystery, this “How do you do, Miss Ravenstock” atmosphere?

“Hope I’m not late,” said she, “my——” and almost she had said “lousy”—“car had a mood on.”

“Obviously a she,” said the captain.

“Don’t men ever have moods?”

“Many and strange ones,” said Tryte quietly, “we can be frail and futile creatures—we men.”

She looked at him with sudden steadfastness. Blondie was not Blondie to-day. Was it her fancy, but was he more man, and was there less beard and tummie?

He placed a chair for her, a gilded Louis Quinze chair, and somewhat surprisingly she accepted the chair.

“The seat of judgment, Miss Ravenstock.”

For a moment she was the flapper.

“Oh, I say, you don’t expect me to play art critic?”

Then—she seemed to become woman.

“Thank you, Mr. Tryte. Is that the picture?”

He nodded, crossed to the centre easel, and lifted the shawl from the picture. Rowena sat and gazed, rather as though she was sitting in front of a camera. She was feeling self-conscious,

but that phase passed as she sat and looked and absorbed the significance of the thing. Tryte had moved away, helped himself to a cigarette, and joined Valentine Samson on the sofa.

There was silence. Rowena sat head up, her hands clasped in her lap, still, utterly still. It was as though she had become part of the picture, and been transformed into the fiercely intent young woman who sat amid those smudged faces and gazed upon the ormolu heroes contending in the arena. "Youth Looks At The Future." Flattered she should have been by his choice of her as the figure of youth, but any salute to self was lost in a more profound reaction. Hitherto Rowena had been Rowena to Rowena, a self-satisfying young person absorbed in her own young affairs, but the vivid challenge of the picture stung her. The Serpent had bitten Eve.

She saw and understood. The intuitive knowledge ascribed to woman may have been over-emphasized, but as Rowena sat and gazed a new knowledge came to her, the shadowy struggle between the things called good and evil. Those other two pictures were sinister, and the one in which she figured offered you a choice, a decision, which was hope. For a while she forgot that she might be expected to say something, but her silence had eloquence. It was Samson who said what she was bidden to say.

"Verdict—as it should be. Butter-headed heroes—and tragedy. Nothing flippant on your tongue, my lass."

Rowena rose slowly, and stood looking over their heads.

"I choose you, Uncle."

"Me?"

"What the sea brings in. Not play-boys."

And then she looked at Maxwell Tryte.

"Thank you, Max. I wish I could live up to that picture."

XIII

THE apple harvest was in, the summer past and England had begun to rain. Maxwell Tryte had said of the English weather that it had been responsible for the Puritans, beer, and Paradise Lost. Was it to be wondered that Byron, Keats and Shelley had sought Italy to escape the English winter of July? So, two men took stock of their situation. Valentine Samson, looking over his apple-shelves in the apple store, and considering the private orders that were coming to him for Cox and Bramley, could think well of the year, and bless the fruits of the earth. Tryte's case was less happy. He was in love, afraid to confess it, and making dreadful fun of himself over so ridiculous a lapse. Moreover, he had written to Mr. Mellaby: "How goes it?" and Mr. Mellaby, as though to prove a point, posted to Maxwell Tryte the latest figures of *Walls of Jericho*.

English sales 7,345

Colonial 3,201

And Max had always counted on his forty thousand as a minimum. Also, America was even more depressing. The sales were down by half, and Max's New York publisher was not so polite as usual.

Economics? Well—yes, and why not? He did not need his London flat; he could stay at his Club when in town. The furniture could be sold, and sold it was at a very good figure, and the lease transferred to a gentleman who was in rubber. Maxwell Tryte was careless about letters, and left them lying about, and Madame Bertrand read them, and so kept herself informed upon the situation. Monsieur Tryte's latest book had been a flop; the critics had said dreadful things about it; and Mr. Montefiore of the Gretna Galleries was not inclined to exhibit Mr. Tryte's pictures. Madame had her own views upon the tricks of fickle fortune. Did the Maestro need this absurd house in England? He did not. It seemed to have brought him misfortune. The Maestro would be much happier in his villa at St. Martin, where the sun shone and life was easy, and economics

could be practised in the French way. Madame Bertrand's campaign included economics. If—ultimately—she was to manage the Maestro, his income would also need conservation and control. Moreover, Mr. Max would be removed from the proximity of marriageable young women who might take a fancy to the Maestro's fame.

Poor Max, so suddenly eager to experience second youth and to behave like a romantic boy!

Should he not prosecute the sweet passion? He was taking exercise, indulging in physical jerks, and had even joined the Medworth Golf Club, though his innocence was prodigious. He took lessons from the local pro, and was regarded by that young man with benign contempt.

"Hit it, sir, hit it. Put some stuff into it. Don't just flop at the ball."

And during one of these exhibitions he was confronted by Rowena and another tigress who were following them and being held up.

"Please go through," said Tryte.

"No, carry on."

He took a desperate swipe, and the topped ball rolled five yards.

"You see. Please go though."

They went through, each driving a lovely ball.

"Who's the little rabbit?" asked Rowena's partner.

"Maxwell Tryte."

"Oh—the painter fellow."

"Yes, my dear, but he—can—paint."

That moment of humiliation prompted Maxwell Tryte to dare a most unsocial and desperate adventure. Sir Everard had not called on him. Well, why should he not call on Sir Everard? That there should be tragedy and comedy in so simple an act is neither here nor there. Tryte got out his super-car and drove to Tanwood.

It was a perfect autumn day. The Tanwood beeches were turning colour, and the green trough of the little valley seemed to flow through flame. Tryte had slowed up at the gates. They

were open, but so sudden and lovely was this vista, that Tryte pulled up just within the gates and sat at gaze. Oh, gentle and gorgeous valley, with the shadows giving to the grass a tinge of blue! This was England, and down yonder in that white, swan-like house dwelt the nymph with the young moon in her hair. For the moment the man—Maxwell Tryte was lost in Maxwell Tryte the artist, and a childlike wonder possessed him as he sat there in the glittering shade of the trees. No facetiousness here, no irony, no play-boy patter, but just utter and satisfying beauty.

In fact, Maxwell Tryte was so much part of the scene, and so translated into it that he did not hear the car slow up behind him. Balked by Tryte's machine, it pulled up of necessity. Someone hooted.

Maxwell Tryte came out of his dream-state as though someone had cuffed his head. He glanced in his mirror, and saw a grey saloon waiting on his tail. Awkward this. He was blocking the way, and there was no room to reverse, so Tryte did the obvious thing. He drove on down to the house; after all—he was going to the house, and the grey car followed him.

Tryte pulled up, and so did the saloon. A man got out of it—Sir Everard himself. He was followed by his daughter.

Tryte opened the near door, but he was not given time to get out.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Tryte."

"Afraid I——"

"Just taking a peep at the place, eh? If you pull up a few yards there's room for you to turn. You can get out again all right."

Tryte's mouth hung open. What he had been about to say faded into silence. Sir Everard's attitude was obvious, only too obvious. The assumption that Tryte could not have any social business at Tanwood was expressed with courtly casualness. Tryte reclosed the door, and reversed his car, and made rather a bad job of it. In fact, he backed into a green tub containing fuchsias, and though no damage was done, he felt a sanguinary fool.

"Sorry, I hope,——"

"No damage. You're all right now. Good-bye. Ease up at the gates. Main road, you know."

And—She—had not said a word, perhaps because her father's cheerful non-possumus had taken her by surprise. Tryte did not see her raise a hand. The repulse had been so thorough that he looked neither to the right hand, nor to the left, but drove for the Tanwood gates and home.

Rowena turned upon her father.

"I say, you weren't very nice to the poor man."

Sir Everard had heard about the picture, and had utterly disapproved of it, in spite of Valentine Samson's championing of the artist. Damned cheek—the fellow painting his daughter, without so much as a by-your-leave.

"I'm not going to have the chap here."

Which was not a wise attitude to adopt with a young woman like Rowena.

"Supposing he happens to be a friend of mine?"

"Then all I can say is, my dear, I deplore your taste."

"Hang it all, pater, I suppose I can exercise taste?"

"Evidently. But don't expect me to conform to it. The fellow's a bad hat."

"A different hat. Not a shootin' or fishin' hat."

Sir Everard's large nose grew red.

"Better put the car away, and not argue, or try to be funny. It doesn't impress me."

Rowena smiled at him.

"You poor old dear."

And Sir Everard walked into the house.

Now, this quite trivial incident was to have a most unexpected effect upon Maxwell Tryte's future. The snub had been administered at one of those moments when the artist in him was feeling sterile and thwarted. Moreover, on the very next day it began to rain and to blow, and the gloom of the English sky descended upon Stallards. Maxwell Tryte could not work. He might try to laugh at himself, but the essential boy in him had been hurt and humiliated. To be de-bunked by a Baronet with a purple nose! Old Port on its dignity! And the daughter had not troubled to intervene.

He tried a fanciful portrait of himself. "Picture of a Fat

Gentleman in Love," but it was a bitter splodge, and he gave it up. The cocktail cabinet was overworked. Rain drenched the windows.

Tryte's mood became—"Oh, hell, what does anything matter?"

Josephine Bertrand was wise as to these symptoms. The Maestro was suffering from temperament, which might be all to the good. Little drinks and restlessness and cigarettes smoked incessantly, and a tumbled bed and things thrown about anyhow. Madame Bertrand was sympathetic.

"This dreadful English weather, monsieur."

"Yes, wet blotting-paper and stale beer, Josephine."

"St. Martin should be pleasanter."

Yes, St. Martin! Escape from this dastardly weather and from prigs who put you in the refrigerator. St. Martin was sunny and easy and a-moral. It did not tantalize you with ridiculous leanings towards young persons who looked like peaches and turned out to be green apples. Rumour—or rather Uncle Sam—had announced that the Ravenstocks would not be abroad this winter. Yes, the Villa Violet could be a consoling refuge, and even the "Rosalies" refreshing after English ice.

"Not a bad place, St. Martin, Josephine."

"It is civilized, monsieur."

"No daily catechism. Can go about with your shirt unbuttoned."

Madame had very definite views upon unbuttoned shirts and the sisterhood of the Rosalies. The Maestro would have to be rescued from all Rosalies, and converted into a tame, industrious artist with his tie in order and his affairs and person controlled by a deliberate and inscrutable lady who was capable of making a docile man sottishly comfortable. Had she not both a figure and a head? Could she not pretend to know something about making life pleasant for a man at board and in bed?

Max took the car out, just to drive somewhere and somehow. Damn the wind, and damn the rain! You could splosh about in a car and defy Sussex and speed regulations, and safety first. Max found himself in Midhurst. He lunched there. It happened

to be a very flat lunch and it remained with him windily and with English stubbornness. Damn this country and its cooking! Now, at St. Martin there were half a dozen little places which could serve you up something coquettish and feminine. All English cooking was ham-faced and loutish. Tryte began to drive home with that lunch and his digestive organs engaged in a rough and tumble, and he had reached the long straight stretch of road which kept in memory an old Roman highway when he became aware of a car behind him. He saw it reflected in the mirror; he recognized it. If it was not the Ravenstock Morris it was the thing's twin sister.

The cheeky little bitch hooted at him. Ye gods, was he going to be passed by that? Maybe mademoiselle wanted to wipe his eyes for him. Tryte let his car out, and for a while the Morris held on. It hooted.

"Damn your sweet eyes," thought Max, "pass me you shall not."

The Morris had no chance with Tryte's speed machine. He drew away; he saw the blue impudence receding in the mirror. It did not hoot again. In two minutes or so Tryte saw nothing but the wet and empty road behind him.

Rowena was peeved, for Rowena it was.

"Ass! I didn't want to race your swank-boat."

For Rowena had proposed to overhaul poor Blondie and inform him that parents could be tiresome codgers, and that his exodus from Tanwood had been instigated by a haughtiness that was purely parental, and had the Morris overtaken Tryte's car certain deplorable things might not have happened to him, but such is life. The bite of a mosquito may present you with septicaemia.

When a man is in the wrong mood, he may do the wrong things and in the wrong way, and if mind can sacrifice matter, matter can revenge itself by mutilating mind. That vast complex of cells which was Maxwell Tryte had been over-stimulated by Maxwell Tryte the man. Call it what you will, Hang-Over, a furred stomach, nerves on edge; in brief Tryte struck one of those days when slight incoordinations of a drugged nervous

system cause slippers to catch in rugs, collar-studs to roll under dressing-tables, trouser-braces to play tricks with you, and the whole material world to suffer from a misplaced sense of humour. It was a Damn and Blast day, and when Max had upset a cup of hot coffee over his trousers he was in a mood to go to the devil.

As a matter of fact, he went to London, with a suitcase and a sour taste in the mouth of his soul.

He put up at his Club, but he was not feeling sociable towards his fellow members, especially so when one of the first persons he ran into was Mr. Harold Catchpole. Tryte had discovered that Catchpole had been his traducer in that very venomous article in a weekly illustrated, and Catchpole offered Tryte one finger and the drawled question: "Well, Tryte, how's the book going?" Catchpole was known to some of his contemporaries as "Old Greasy," and Tryte, reacting to the job, crooked one finger round Catchpole's and smiled at those rows of yellow teeth.

"Great guns. That article of yours gave it a huge boost. Nothing like poison for stimulating the public."

Tryte lunched alone, and drank half a bottle of Nuits St. George and two glasses of port. Contact with Old Greasy had made him feel shabby, and shabbiness seemed in the air. What next? Should he go to a show? He wandered out into an incipient drizzle, and found himself in Piccadilly Circus. How did Eros up there like London and its dastardly dampness? Not very stimulating to love, yet provoking you to seek tarts round the corner. Tryte drifted into Shaftsbury Avenue, and up a side-street saw one of the smaller cinemas. Well, it would be dry and dark and low-brow in there. He purchased a top-price seat, and was stuffed away in a back row by an obscure wench with a torch. An American comedy confronted him, much America and not much comedy, save that it was furiously knock-about. Tryte sprawled, bored and ironic. How did the public manage to suck up this stuff?

And then he became aware of a presence. Something had sidled in beside him, something that was scented, something that seemed to impinge upon him with succulent intimacy.

A cigarette was produced and the conventional question asked.

"Have you a match?"

Tryte had. He lit it, held it to the cigarette, and was aware of a rather drawn, dark profile, with mordant lips puckered about the white tube. A black, bobbed head, the hair somehow suggesting crisp provocation, long white fingers.

"Thanks," said the husky voice; "any stuff in the picture?"

"Plenty—but poor."

The dark head seemed to incline his way. He was aware of a knee touching his.

In another minute Max's arm was round her, and her head was on his shoulder. The smell of her might hide sweet sin, but it was provocative, and in the half darkness almost mysterious and sacramental, the sacred odour of sex. She wore no corsets, and Tryte's fingers divined a leanness about her; thin women could be attractive to a man inclined to fat. No flabby cushion—this, but a taut, vibrant creature who could be fierce in the sex-struggle. Was she a pro, or a creature like himself, bored with life, and ready for a strange occasion?

"What a piffing picture," said Tryte.

"Oh—just so-so. Anything seems bad enough for the B.P."

"Poor old B.P. Not all English, are you?"

"How did you guess that? Clever boy."

"What's the other half?"

"Russian."

"Good business. Feel that you can dance?"

"I'd dance your head off, my dear."

"Or my legs. What about it? Dinner and dance. Got a nest in town."

"What do you think? Little flat in Chelsea."

"Arty-arty, are you?"

"Never you mind what I do. Not in the regular sisterhood. Just felt—emetic."

"Say, darling, you have a tongue. I was feeling like that. Happy coincidence, perhaps. Vienna Nights and all that. What shall I call you?"

"Linda."

"And I'm Max. Linda and Max. Sounds like music hall. Well, what about it?"

"Had enough?"

"Let's have a look at each other in the daylight. Rather think you're my type."

"Let's go—I have a thirst."

"Same here, and in more ways than one."

Maxwell Tryte dined, danced and passed the night with Linda, having transferred his suitcase to her Chelsea flat. It was not an establishment for two, but what did that matter when a couple found each other provocative. Linda had a kind of haggard, Belle Dame Sans Merci comeliness. To Max she might seem something of a mystery woman, which—indeed—she was, and far more perilously so than he suspected, for this dark, thin, vibrant woman was not quite sane about men. Clean she was in body, meticulously so, but she was the possessor of a sore soul, and though her candour could be catastrophic, she seemed to move in the shadows.

She seemed to be the very woman for his mood of "Damn everything, let's get going." She wore a black frock with a red flower in her bosom. Max knew of the particular place where they could dance and dine and souse the sweet anguish of sex in wine that was wine. They grew merry together; they looked into each other's eyes; her voice became even more husky, and once or twice she coughed. When they danced it was cheek to cheek, bodies pressed close. He could feel her long slim legs caressing his knee.

Maxwell Tryte could carry his liquor, but he was well primed when they went Chelseawards in a taxi. He had bribed the porter heavily to procure that taxi. They sat with their arms round each other.

"Feeling good, my sweet?"

"Angelic."

"Funny how one falls to certain people. You and I seem to be wearing the same skin."

She gave a little, husky laugh.

Maxwell Tryte could swear that never had intimacies been more intimate and exciting. She knew the sex-game from A to Z, and was as passionate as a man could desire.

But her morning mood, what a difference! She was sour, curt, non-consenting.

"Get up and get out, my lad. I have a hang-over."

Almost it seemed that he was repulsive to her, and that her sudden fierce aloofness was that of a creature who had had her secret revenge upon man, and was filled with disgust.

"My sweet, you seem——"

"Oh, get up and dress. The morning after is the morning after."

She looked haggard and tired. All the sex-grace had gone from her.

"I'm a hag. Better clear out. No, I'm staying in bed."

Maybe that was the strangest toilet Max Tryte had made—ever. It was somehow flurried and undignified and surreptitious. She lay with her back turned to him, eyes closed.

"What about an encore, Linda, when——?"

He was feeling in his wallet, and she heard the crackle of notes, and suddenly she turned and flared at him.

"Don't you leave that muck here. Get out, and don't come back."

He replaced the notes.

"Holy of holies, you do wake up on the wrong side."

"Enough said. Go and get shaved."

And feeling shabby and vaguely afraid of—something—he knew not what, he left her.

XIV

MAXWELL TRYTE never saw her again, nor did he remember the name of the street in which she lived, for a taxi had taken him there, and a taxi took him away, and both in coming and going he had been absorbed in other matters. But, shades of sweet sin, the morning-after had painted her in macabre colours! What an odd fish! Madame Sinistra with poison on her lips! Max, too was feeling the morning-after, and he fell into a sudden panic. Had she——? And why had he not taken proper precautions? He was barbered at his club, and he breakfasted there, and after breakfast he rang up his doctor, and managing to make contact with him, became suddenly shy both of his business and the phone.

"You'll be in? Good. I'll come along at once before you go to the hospital. No, nothing serious. I'd like a little advice."

Maxwell Tryte attempted to confront the confession with jauntiness, but it was thin music.

"I'm afraid I've been a bloody fool, Moorhead. Well, it's like this."

Dr. Moorhead was a modern, and tolerant of man's urges, but he was fastidious, and Tryte's confession was not a song of cleanliness.

"You ought to know better at your age, Tryte."

"Needn't rub it in. Just give me—the professional stuff."

Moorhead did so, a prescription and advice. If there was any danger of him having been infected with the milder of the plagues, the injection would scotch it, but if within a period of time anything else manifested, Tryte must come to him immediately.

"You bet I will. Thanks muchly."

Nor is there any need to follow a rather shame-faced Tryte into the respectable shop of a most respectable chemist's, and observe him hand the prescription in. This was but an incident,

and an incident that was to be made appear merely shabby and trivial by the future.

So, Maxwell Tryte, having been frightened, felt virtuous, for in spite of the sentimentalists, Fear with its flail is a more potent persuader than the mixed emotion called Love. Man can love all sorts of things, drugs and drink, and gormandizing, and swindling his neighbour, and preaching at others, and he may love good things too, a comrade, and a garden and his dog, but fear is fire or ice, and not to be argued with or fobbed off with some political swindle. Even the great Julius, dude, swordsman, and profligate, became gently moral when the fear of death was upon him. Maxwell Tryte was caught by the backwash of fear. This sort of thing would not do. He was drifting, becoming consciously decadent. His work would suffer. It was time to pull himself together, and to remember Uncle Sam's words upon self-discipline. Yes, he would go into retreat, travel to St. Martin, shut himself up there, and work. Work was the thing, the one satisfying and sure staff for a man who was a hedonistic wobbler.

So, Tryte wandered into "Cook's" in Berkeley Street, and instructed Messrs. Cook to provide him with tickets and reservations for the Riviera. He chose November 11th, Armistice Day, for his date of departure. And then he remembered that Madame Bertrand might have to travel in advance to prepare the Villa Violet for his occupation. Well, that could be arranged in a few days. Yes, his passport was in order.

Having made this decision peace came to Maxwell Tryte. The feeling may have been fallacious, but it sent him back to Stallards under the illusion that he had passed through and transcended one of the black and sterile periods in an artist's life. Even Rowena Ravenstock had become an impossible and disturbing figure in this restless interlude. A man of forty or so imagining himself in love with a flapper! Silly fool! Such romantics should be experienced in the abstract and not in the concrete. He was all for Captain Valentine Samson, and discipline and a taut, straight back.

He sent Madame Bertrand a wire.

"Returning at once."

Madame meditated upon that message. Was the Maestro still acutely bored, and had London failed to assuage his ennui, or was he returning to prosecute a ridiculous passion? Madame ordered for her master a dinner that she knew would be his in every detail. The wine was on ice. Madame had herself gathered the ripest of apples. She waited. She saw the taxi from Melford drive up. She was at the door, calm, inscrutable, like soothing snow from Olympus.

"Well, Josephine, here we are."

Her scrutiny was guarded. The Maestro had the face of a boy happy on returning from school.

"I am glad of your return, monsieur. Has monsieur had tea?"

"No."

"Will monsieur take it in the studio?"

"Good idea. Take it with me, Josephine. I want to talk about one or two things."

Madame Bertrand's bosom rose and fell. She was to sit and drink tea with the Maestro, and perhaps hear——? She herself carried in Tryte's suitcase.

"Tea shall be ready in ten minutes, monsieur."

She, in person, carried the tray in and found Maxwell Tryte gazing, not at English youth, but at La Belle France as she expressed it. Again, Madame Bertrand breathed deeply.

"Tea. Splendid. Sit down, Josephine."

Madame sat down with a feeling of being somewhat the woman in possession. Her hand was steady, white and deliberate.

"You were looking at the picture, monsieur."

"Yes, I don't think I did you justice. You are a comfortable creature, Josephine. Well, it's to be St. Martin in three weeks."

Madame's dark eyes revealed deep lights.

"I am glad, monsieur."

"So am I."

"If I may say so—monsieur does his best work at St. Martin."

"Just what I feel, my dear. I suppose you won't mind going on ahead and getting things in order."

Madame dropped three lumps of sugar into his cup.

"I am happy to do anything that makes monsieur—comfortable."

But Maxwell Tryte was not to go to St. Martin. The tickets and reservations arrived from Messrs. Cook's, only to remain unused. Josephine Bertrand, having arranged for the staffing of Stallards during the Maestro's absence, was preparing to pack when the thing happened.

The maid who carried in Tryte's early morning tea came to knock at madame's door.

"Are you there, Mrs. Bertrand?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"The master doesn't seem well. He says that he has a terrible headache and is staying in bed."

Madame opened her door. Her black hair was down on her shoulders, and she was wearing a flowered dressing-gown.

"Did he drink his tea, Florence?"

"I don't know. He told me to leave the blinds down."

Josephine Bertrand saw no cause for anxiety, but—undoubtedly—sympathy was indicated. When the maid had gone Madame passed down the corridor in her slippers and knocked at Maxwell Tryte's door.

"Yes?"

"It is—Josephine, monsieur. Monsieur is not well?"

"Come in," said the voice.

The blinds were down and the room in semi-darkness. Tryte was lying with his head buried in the pillow. He had poured out his tea, but the cup had not been touched.

"Monsieur has the headache?"

"My God, yes, a cracker. And my neck feels stiff."

Madame touched his hand. It was hot and dry, and suddenly he shivered, and with such intensity that the bed shook.

"I think I have a temperature."

"Perhaps it is influenza. Monsieur ought to have a doctor."

"Oh, lord, I'm going to be sick. Get something, there's a good woman."

Madame got something, and held his head while the spasm lasted. He groaned, and continued to shiver.

"Don't take it away yet. I'd better have a doctor."

"Certainly, monsieur. I will go and phone immediately to Melford. Would monsieur like some aspirin?"

"Feel I can't swallow anything. And I'm so damned cold."

"Excuse me, monsieur; I will go and telephone."

Dr. Boddy of Melford came, saw, and was reassuring and ready with a diagnosis. Acute influenza—obviously. Dr. Boddy was in the early fifties, but he should have belonged to the Victorian fifties, a pompous, puffy little man, standing five feet three, with a large bald head and high-powered glasses. He would have made an admirable Pickwick, without Mr. Pickwick's twinkling humanity. Dr. Boddy never twinkled. There are two types of physician who can be a danger to the community, the bored doctor, and the doctor who is never puzzled. Dr. Boddy would not allow himself to be puzzled. Like many men of small stature he was inclined to arrogance.

"Just back from London, I hear."

"Yes."

"Picked it up somewhere in the metropolis. Did you attend any theatres?"

Tryte was feeling too submerged and bemused to be bored by Dr. Boddy.

"I went to a cinema."

"Poisonous places. Bed, milk diet, and an analgesic for the headache. I expect you will be quite yourself again, Mr. Tryte, in a few days."

"I was to travel to the South of France next week."

"Postpone it, sir, postpone it. Must not risk any complications when you have had an acute attack of this type."

But, in a day or two Dr. Boddy had to admit that he was puzzled. Tryte's temperature ran up, the headache grew more acute and was accompanied by double vision; the stiffness and pain in the neck spread to the back. There were attacks of acute vomiting. Tryte was both restless and semi-delirious.

Madame Bertrand had postponed her departure for St. Martin.

Dr. Boddy brought in his partner for a consultation, and his partner was posed, and did not like the look of the case.

Maxwell Tryte, dazed and yet in acute pain and distress, somehow sensed professional inadequacy.

"Get Moorhead."

That was what he muttered.

"Get Moorhead. My man in town."

The two doctors looked at each other.

"You mean—Moorhead of Bart's?"

"Yes. Knows all about me."

Dr. Boddy's junior partner happened to be a Bart's man, and Moorhead was more than a figure to him.

"Better get him down. Don't like the look of the case."

"Know Moorhead?"

"Yes. I was his house-physician. Great man."

"Then you had better try and get into touch with him."

"What about a nurse?"

"Yes, we had better have a nurse in."

John Moorhead drove down that afternoon, and was met by a Dr. Boddy who was even more pompous than usual. Moorhead was not impressed. Supposing they had a look at the patient? They went upstairs to Tryte's room.

Tryte, in a state of restless stupor, was capable of recognizing his own particular physician.

"Glad you've come. Oh, my head!"

Moorhead's grave face reflected his swift appreciation of the gravity of the case. He made his examination while Dr. Boddy stood stockily and in silence on the hearthrug.

"Haven't tried a lumbar puncture, have you?"

Dr. Boddy's eyes goggled behind their glasses.

"Lumbar puncture?"

"Yes; it may prove of considerable significance."

Meanwhile, John Moorhead was remembering that interview he had had with Maxwell Tryte. Could there have been any significance in that affair with a strange woman? Not the usual thing—of course. But had the lady been one of those sinister creatures, an undetected carrier of a disease which was somewhat rare in an adult?

When Moorhead came to the final conclusion, and announced

it to Dr. Boddy, the Melford man exclaimed: "But, no spots!" and then, perhaps to cherish his dignity, attempted to argue the case. Spotted Fever without spots! Dr. Boddy preferred to diagnose Tryte's case as an attack of Enteric, with cerebral symptoms predominant.

Moorhead was apt to be curt with pompous people. He was a busy man, and pompous egoism wasted time.

"I think you had better wait for the report—after the lumbar puncture. Have you ever seen a case of cerebro-spinal meningitis?"

"Several," said Dr. Boddy, which was untrue.

Moorhead smiled like a secret sceptic.

"Rather a rare disease in country districts. One would not suspect it. Moreover, it has abnormal forms."

Dr. Boddy grunted.

"I still hold——"

"Supposing we wait for the bacteriologist's report. Now, about treatment and nursing."

"I've arranged for a nurse."

"He will need two. I think I had better send a very experienced woman down from town."

Again Dr. Boddy grunted.

Josephine Bertrand was waiting for the doctors at the foot of the stairs. Tea was laid in the studio. Dr. Moorhead accepted it. Dr. Boddy excused himself on the grounds that he had urgent visits to pay. Madame served Moorhead in person.

"Are you—the housekeeper?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I had better have a word with you."

Madame Bertrand stood with black and white solidity to hear this news, news that left St. Martin on forlorn horizons, and was capable of frightening a selfish woman into abandoning all plans. Cerebro-spinal meningitis! How terrible! And was her dear maestro in danger of dying? What frustration; what waste of careful devotion!

"Oh, monsieur, this is—terrible. You do not think—it will be fatal?"

Moorhead looked at her diagnostically. A handsome woman—this, with a deep and tragic voice, and eyes that showed pity.

"No. I hope not. I think I ought to warn you that the disease is—to some extent—infectious."

"I am not afraid, monsieur—I shall not desert my post."

"I am sure you will not. I am sending down an experienced nurse. It would be as well to leave the case wholly to the nurses. And I should not tell the staff."

"I understand, Monsieur. But may I be pardoned if I ask a question? We French women are realists."

Moorhead poured himself out a second cup of tea.

"You may ask it. Whether I shall answer it——"

"Of course. I understand, monsieur. But—the afterwards. Does not fever of the brain—leave—damage?"

Moorhead glanced at her sharply.

"Sometimes. But—that——"

"I ask it, monsieur, because—I am devoted to Monsieur Tryte, and I—I—can value his work."

Moorhead was silent for a second or two as though considering his questioner's sincerity.

"I think—we had better leave such problems to the future."

"Yes, monsieur, I understand."

Moorhead was right in his diagnosis, but the problem that intrigued him was how Tryte had picked up the disease. Infection is by what may be described as a "Salivary Spray," more or less close contact by mouth with a sufferer or a carrier of the disease. There were "Carriers" who had not developed "Cerebro-spinal," and yet bore the bug about with them. Had Tryte's most unfortunate sex-adventure brought him into contact with a woman who could transmit the pest to man?

As a matter of fact it was so, though the connection was never proved. The news of the illness of so celebrated a person as Maxwell Tryte was indeed "News," and it was Madame Bertrand who surrendered the truth to the Press.

"Maxwell Tryte dangerously ill with Cerebro-spinal Meningitis."

He was listed daily among the notable people who were ill,

and his condition reported upon, and a certain person, reading the news, felt secretly revenged. Max! Then it must be the famous Max. She had good reasons for wishing herself to be fatal to man, but never had she expected to plant such poison upon so startling a victim.

Linda had shorn the hair of Max. There was no pity in her for blind Samsons.

The Captain, gathering late fruit and lovely fruit into a half-bushel basket, and depositing each apple gently so that it should not be bruised, heard the news from Will Spray.

"Have 'ee heard, sir, how the gentleman at Stallards has brain fever?"

Samson—stooping—with an apple in his hand, straightened like a spring that has been released.

"What!"

Will repeated the statement, and Samson, after a moment of stillness, placed the apple in the basket. If the news was true, what strange nemesis had overtaken this play-boy, this man-child who had asked of life nothing but to do what he pleased?

But was it true? Brain-fever sounded too much like a Ouida novel. Samson went into the cottage and hunted out yesterday's *Times*. He read the *Times* as he read his Bible, having a man's admiration for that most human of classics, but the list of the sick he passed over, like the births and marriages, though the deaths were worthy of notice.

He found the item he sought.

"Mr. Maxwell Tryte's condition is still very serious. He is lying ill at his house in Surrey."

Captain Valentine Samson abandoned his apple-gathering, put on a reasonably respectable hat, and set out for Stallards.

HE was met by Madame.

She stood in the late October sunlight, one white hand on the edge of the crimson door, a sanguinary door, and even her strong face showed signs of weariness. She was wearing a flowered apron, and French slippers instead of shoes, and she gave to Valentine Samson the impression of a woman indefatigably responsible and in control, which indeed she was, for the indoor staff had deserted and fled from the frightening phrase—"Spotted Fever." But the French peasant blood in Josephine Bertrand flowed from a formidable heart. In metaphor she had rolled up her sleeves and her skirts, put on slippers instead of sabots, and seized an occasion that offered her infinite possibilities. She cooked, she made beds, she cleaned, with the two nurses in the house, and the Maestro semi-conscious.

Valentine Samson raised his hat to her.

"I am very sorry to hear the news, madame."

She looked him in the face, and made no inviting movement which said "Enter." The chance was hers and she knew it, and any visitor might be viewed as an invader. Moreover, this sailor was man and might be very much man in conflict with her woman. He was dominant and so was she.

"It is indeed—tragic, monsieur."

"How is Mr. Tryte?"

"Still in great danger. We have two nurses, and the London doctor comes. It is a blessing. The Melford doctor, oh—la—la!"

"I am sorry."

"Oh, I manage, monsieur. I am strong. I do not run away."

"You mean—the others——?"

"Yes, they were frightened; they packed and went."

Samson looked shocked.

"Good Lord! You are all alone?"

"Oh, I manage, monsieur. I am strong. I do not ask monsieur to enter—because——"

The sailor gave her that little shimmery smile of his.

"At my age, madame, one is not afraid of many things. But is there anything I can do?"

"No, monsieur, I think not. I can manage."

Valentine Samson had put on his hat. He took it off to her as he turned to go.

"I salute you, madame. I suppose you have been pestered with telegrams and inquiries?"

"No, monsieur."

"No?"

"No, monsieur."

Samson walked down through the garden a little shocked by the strangeness of Maxwell Tryte's isolation. How ironic that one of the world's public pets should be so friendless in a crisis such as this, and that though he was "News," no one had gone to the telephone to ask whether he would die or live. One of the most decorative of the world's play-boys left to the care of his housekeeper! Was Genius so friendless? for Maxwell Tryte had genius. Was the secret jealousy of lesser men so universal, and was this success like some gawdy electric sign that blazed and died with the turn of a switch? Was an envious world gloating? "Tryte's got it. Good business!"

Near the gate Samson came upon Sam Stubbs cleaning up one of the borders for the winter. He turned a leery face upon the gentleman, but he did not salute him. Samson paused. He found it easy to be easy with plain men.

"Bad business, Stubbs, this."

Stubbs leaned upon his digging-fork. He was always ready for a pause.

"It be, sir."

"So you haven't run away. Like Mrs. Bertrand you've stuck to the job."

Stubbs gave him a malevolent grin.

"Ah, she's got the eggs where she wants 'em."

Captain Samson passed on. The flavour of Samuel was not that of the gentle violet. Now—just what had the fellow meant by that? Samson was frowning as he opened the gate.

Rowena was not a great reader of papers, and she had been away on a motoring holiday, nor did the news of the Tryte

tragedy reach her until she returned home. November was being kind, for November can be kinder than April, and the sun had shone upon the fall and flutter of golden leaves. Her father, coming up from the paddock with a gun on his shoulder saw the Morris, and his daughter unloading kit from the car.

"Hallo, Ro. Had a good time?"

"Champion, as they say up there."

She planted a curt kiss almost on his prodigious nose.

"Brought any scalps back?"

"Got a cup."

"You young pot-hunter."

"Shut up, old thing. I'll have to get my portrait painted with it by Blondie."

Sir Everard broke his gun, and extracted the cartridges. He dropped them into a pocket.

"Nothing doing there. Haven't you heard?"

"What?"

"Tryte went down with spotted fever. Extraordinary business. They thought he'd peg out."

Rowena's dark eyes were wide open.

"Spotted fever?"

"Yes, can the leopard change his——"

"Shame, pater."

"My dear!"

"I thought you were bigger than that. Is he——?"

Sir Everard looked a little uncomfortable.

"Oh, well, perhaps I—— Yes, he is getting over it, but from what I hear his condition isn't exactly rosy. About time for tea. I'll meet you in front of the fire."

Sir Everard went in to clean his gun; he was very conscientious about guns, and Rowena, having deposited her luggage in the hall, drove the car round to the garage. Almost she was wearing her set-all, five-all face. Spotted fever, condition not too rosy, strange business. It was. Maybe she saw further than her father did, and with the eyes of youth. What did this beastly disease leave behind it? Poor little Blondie! Rotten bad luck.

Valentine Samson, walking over to Stallards for news, found

a car outside the house, John Moorhead's car. Samson was in the act of ringing the bell, when the door opened, disclosing Moorhead and a nurse.

Samson stood aside, while Moorhead buttoned up his coat and gave the nurse some final instructions.

"Excuse me, are you Dr. Moorhead?"

"I am."

"I'm a friend of Tryte's, and I came to inquire——"

The two men looked at each other and the looking was good.

"Are you Captain Samson by any chance?"

"Yes."

"Tryte's been asking for you."

"May I see him?"

"In a day or two. Can I give you a lift anywhere?"

"Thank you, but I live the other way. Is it possible for you to tell me how your patient is?"

"I think so. I'm afraid there are going to be rather unhappy after effects. This beastly disease sometimes——"

Moorhead paused, pulling on his gloves.

"You see, when there has been inflammatory trouble—involving both brain and spinal cord—the sequelæ. Sorry, that's a silly technical term. What I mean is—there may be mental and temperamental changes, even local paralysis."

Samson looked grim.

"Good lord! Poor lad. Will it interfere with his—work?"

"It may do."

"Permanently?"

"I hope not."

Moorhead pulled off a glove and held out a hand.

"Afraid I'm a busy man."

"Thank you for telling me. May I go in?"

They shook hands.

"Yes. I think you might be good for him, Captain Samson."

That was a point of view which Valentine Samson had not considered, now or at any period in his life. He had had no liking for uplift or good works, and a profound mistrust of people who prated of spiritual things. Why good works? Being mealy mouthed and patronizing towards the actual poor,

the poor, not in worldly goods, but in backbone and conscience. Samson would have ordered matters in a very different way; character, efficiency, discipline, example, and let the rotter rot. It had been said of Samson that he was a hard man; he was, but only to the superfluous and the flabby. No man humbugged himself less than he.

Meanwhile, the door had been closed by the nurse, and to his surprise he found it locked. Was this a sort of pest-house? He rang the bell.

It was Josephine Bertrand who opened the door.

"Bon jour, monsieur."

She filled the doorway like a sentry in a sentry-box.

"Good-day to you, madame. I have just seen the doctor. He says I can see Mr. Tryte."

Madame stood her ground.

"I think I should ask the nurse, monsieur."

Obstruction—eh! And why? Samson sensed it, and questioned it as he might have questioned the movements of a hostile ship.

"Hardly necessary, madame. I—can explain to the nurse."

Josephine Bertrand gave him one steadfast stare, and then stood aside. She too could sense things, and this was no man to be flouted.

"Bien, monsieur. Will monsieur enter. I will fetch the nurse."

Samson walked in, laid his hat with deliberation on a table, and sat down in one of the lounge chairs. Now, why had this French woman tried to keep him out? There was a motive; always there was a motive, and with a woman it was mostly emotional.

The same nurse appeared, Dr. Moorhead's special, one of those big blonde women who can combine efficiency with kindness. There was no obstruction here. Actually, Maxwell Tryte had been asking for Captain Samson. But the nurse had a warning to utter.

"I'm afraid you will find Mr. Tryte rather—changed."

Samson nodded.

"I won't stay too long, nurse. I've had my temperature sent up by a bedside bore."

The bedroom blinds were half drawn, though the man in the bed was always asking for more light. "I can't see things, nurse." She had opened the door for Valentine Samson, and she put her head round it.

"Here's a friend to see you, Mr. Tryte."

She closed the door, and for a second or so Samson stood quite still, shocked by the thing he saw in the bed. It was one of those instant pictures which are flashed upon the human consciousness, vivid and mordant and unforgettable. Tryte's beard had gone, and his face was like the little, pinched face of a sick child. Even those brilliant eyes of his looked blurred. His hands were spread upon the blue quilt, strangely emaciated hands, and suggesting helplessness and futility.

Samson's static state lasted but for a second or so, and Tryte did not sense its significance.

"Well, my lad, a nice fright you have given us."

Cheerfulness was the thing, but a cheerfulness that was not too muscular and blatant. He sat down beside Tryte's bed, long legs outstretched, his hands in his trouser pockets. Tryte was smiling at him, but Samson noticed that one half of the face seemed to smile more markedly than the other.

"How are—apples, sir?"

"Wonderful crop. Picking the last of them. I'll have to bring you some. An apple a day—you know."

Tryte laughed feebly at the mild joke.

"Don't want to keep my doctor away. He pulled me through."

"Yes, I met him. Great man at his job, I should say."

He was aware of Tryte's left hand moving over the blue quilt. It slipped itself under the right hand and raised it, and the right hand's fingers remained stiff.

"Funny business. Can't move my right hand yet."

Samson was only too conscious of the implications of this simple act.

"Can't you? Oh, that's just a question of time, I expect. Massage and all that. The doctors are clever these days."

Tryte's left hand was still supporting his right as though

weighing its helplessness. He looked up at the sailor, and his eyes were frightened.

"Supposing it doesn't?"

"Of course it will."

"But if it doesn't?"

Samson sat up straight, chin thrust forward, and smiled at him.

"Well, you'd paint with your left, my lad. Nothing would stop you painting—or writing."

Suddenly he was shocked to see that Tryte's eyes were blurred and wet.

"I—I—feel so strange. Can't see things properly. Something seems to have gone."

"My dear man," said Samson with emphasis, "you've been most damnably ill. You're in dock. Take it easy. Got to get fit again. I bet you will feel very different in a month or so."

Samson left his chair by the bed and walked to the window to raise the half-lowered blind. More light, Goethe's last cry. How was that? He stood looking down at the steep and autumnal garden, with the bathing-pool showing below like a vague blue eye. Bad business this, sight affected, the craftsman's hand helpless, self-control ragged. And Samson was reminded of a scene in a ship's cabin, and of a shivering lad sitting on his bunk and confessing to blank cowardice. No scolding on that occasion, no curt scorn—"Get up, you bloody little funk." Samson had sat down beside the lad, put an arm round him, and confessed that he too had felt in a devil of a funk before his first action, but that when the show had started you found yourself and your feet.

Tryte's case was different, oh—very different. There was a softness here, temperament, the frightened frustration of the man-child who had played for years with pen and brush. Was the condition temporary? If not—here were the makings of a human tragedy. Samson's hand was feeling in his pocket for his pipe. He brought it out, looked at it, put it away again.

"Feel like smoking yet, Tryte?"

"I haven't tried."

"Like to? What about a cigarette?"

Tryte was blinking away tears, and rubbing at his left eye with his left hand.

"Too much light? Making your eyes water."

Samson lowered the blind. He happened to have a cigarette-case on him, and he opened it, took out a cigarette, and crossing to the bed, stuck it between Tryte's lips.

"Only a gasper, I'm afraid. The first smoke always makes one feel good."

He struck a match and held it to the cigarette.

"Mind if I smoke a pipe? Or half one. I shall have to let some air in later, or the nurse will curse me."

Tryte was smoking his cigarette, and wondering whether Valentine Samson had been speaking the truth when he had ascribed watery eyes to too much light.

XVI

HIS intimates at Cambridge had christened Sir Everard Ravenstock "Cyrano," though he had been much less sensitive about his prodigious proboscis than had Cyrano de Bergerac, and reference to it had not provoked the drawing of swords. Public school candour can be very educative, and might be of value in chastening the raw and sometimes venomous conceit of prospective Commissars erupting from secondary schools. Even rude rowing-coaches have their uses.

"Don't look out of the boat, damn you, Number Four. That nose of yours spoils her trim."

So, when Sir Everard heard, as hear he did, of Maxwell Tryte's loss of a beard, and other far more serious items, he was inclined to think that it would do the fellow good. A chap had to learn to take his knocks, and a joking jackanapes like Tryte had had too much jam and butter on his bread.

"Jolly good medicine, Sam. Maybe he'll learn to take it."

There were occasions when Valentine Samson found his friend too pronouncedly Eton and Trinity in his muscular philosophy. Not that Eton and Trinity produced nothing but Sir Everards. Moreover, Sir Everard had the Englishman's horror of subtleties, and neutral colours, and high-falutin language, and fellows who had the gift of the gab and did not take a cold bath daily. He might be Old Port, like his nose, but he was not such a country-house fool as his conversation sometimes suggested. His nose might be red, but it had a sense of smell.

"Think a moment, old man. Supposing you couldn't sight a gun or swing a golf-club? And Tryte's a much younger man."

"Yes, Sam; I recant. One does not mean all one says, you know."

"I'm glad of that. One ought to be educated against over-emphasis."

News of the Tryte tragedy came to Rowena through her father, and over porridge and bacon and eggs, which should have been ballast against exaggeration, but Sir Everard seemed prone to take the colour from his nose and paint the lily with it, and Maxwell Tryte was no lily to Sir Everard.

"Of course—the fellow asked for it."

"Just how?" said his daughter.

"Well, living the life he did. Bound to run into trouble. Not a subject for young gentlewomen."

Rowena went head in air. Young gentlewomen—indeed! As if the younger generation had not discovered that life could be lousy, and that nothing was to be gained by putting on moral blinkers. There were times when her father exasperated Rowena.

"I don't see the connection."

Sir Everard took cover behind the morning paper.

"So much the better. I'm glad."

But he had challenged controversy, and a passionate realism that he did not understand.

"Half a mo', pater. Are you suggesting that poor Blondie got what he deserved?"

"Better leave the subject alone, my dear."

"Do you really think I came out of Cranford? The idea is—that Max——"

Sir Everard poked his nose over his paper.

"Max! Since when——?"

"I'm the person to be shocked."

"I sometimes wonder whether you are capable of being shocked."

"I—am."

She reached for the marmalade pot and proceeded to give her father an exact and frank exposition of the case. Did Sir Everard think that the beastly disease which had fallen upon Maxwell Tryte was the result of amorous indiscretion? It was not, and Sir Everard should know that it was not, and if he did not know it, his education had been neglected.

Her father did not lose his temper. On the contrary he put down his paper and glared up at a portrait which hung behind Rowena's chair. How the mother had reincarnated in the daughter! And Sir Everard experienced one of those sudden and poignant moments—like pain in an old wound—when the precious thing that he had lost manifested in the daughter, and caused him acute anguish, and a yearning for which there was no assuagement. Time healed wounds, but not completely so, and now and again a hand would tear time aside. At such moments Sir Everard felt a lonely old man, just pottering about until he too went elsewhere.

Gently he said: "I expect you are right, my dear. I—apologize. Thanks for the lecture."

Rowena had not missed the glance at the picture on the wall behind her. She had been very young when Elizabeth Ravenstock had died. A little woman with dark eyes and a proud carriage of the head, and an air of sparkling courage, she had passed on much to her daughter.

Rowena's impulse was characteristic. She pushed back her chair, brushed round the table, and kissed the top of her father's head just where the hair was thin.

"Sorry. Rather an old dear, aren't you?"

The crow's-feet crinkled up round her father's eyes.

"Just like your mother—sometimes."

For Elizabeth, after one of her flashes of sincerity, had so often hurried round to give him the warm kiss of peace.

Josephine Bertrand had changed her room. She had moved herself and her possessions into the very luxurious and special guest-chamber next to Maxwell Tryte's, and her reason for the transference was that the night-nurse had left, and that Madame would be nearer the Maestro, should he need her in the night. In fact she now occupied a kind of little suite, complete with bathroom, and when the new staff, whom she had managed to engage, arrived, Madame's position in the house was subtly different. She had staged for herself a new and more comprehensive part. She was Mr. Maxwell Tryte's secretary-manageress. She gave orders; she handled the finances; she answered the telephone, wrote letters.

For, here was her matriarchal opportunity. She had divined it, and put out a firm white hand to grasp it. His illness had left Maxwell Tryte a partial wreck, both in body and in mind, and a childish self-pity consumed him. He was frightened, frightened of the very changes in himself and of their implications, and of the blurring of his brain. A fatal stupor seemed to muffle his mind. He could not concentrate—even upon the most banal of books. There were times when he seemed to be wakening asleep, and dreaming all that which was passing about him. He was alive and not alive. A palsied self seemed to be imprisoned in a live-dead body. His mental processes fumbled. There were days when he forgot the names of familiar things and persons and groped in a kind of fog for the realities which eluded him.

He had moments of panic, moments when the mist cleared and he saw things vividly, and in all their problematical nakedness. No longer was he Maxwell Tryte, but a live man shut up in a half dead body. What of the future, what of his work, what of finance? Here were prospects to terrify him. These interludes of clear-mindedness were more poignant than the periods when his brain felt like wet wool, and his vision was dimmed. His head ached intermittently. He would lie and look at his right hand and try to move its fingers, and when they failed to move a dull misery descended upon him.

What did the doctor say?

"Patience, my lad, patience. Give nature her chance."

Patience! He—the most impatient of men where self-expression was concerned!

Medicine, injections, massage. The nurse worked at his hand, and neck, and head. An ophthalmic specialist came down to examine his eyes, and was grave and reserved, save to Moorhead.

"Neuritis of the left optic. May clear up. Probably—glasses will help eventually."

He was like a child torn by night-terrors.

One night he woke in the darkness, and in one of those panic moods when every imaginable woe seemed to be crowding round his bed. He groped for the switch and could not find it.

He cried out: "Nurse, nurse. I can't see—— I can't see."

That was the immediate horror, this menacing darkness, and the fear that he had lost his sight.

His door opened. A hand switched on the light. He was panting, sweating.

"Oh, God, I can see."

She closed the door and came to stand beside his bed. A firm, cool hand was laid upon his forehead.

"Josephine——"

"There, there, mon pauvre. You were frightened."

His left hand slid across and asked to be held. She held it.

"It was dark. I couldn't see. I thought——"

"But you can see me."

He looked up at her.

"Don't take your hand away. It's—it's—real. What should I do without you, Josephine?"

She sat down on the edge of his bed.

"Doesn't monsieur understand?"

"What?"

"That—I am—happy—to help."

The smile he gave her was a pathetic grimace.

"You are a good woman, Josephine."

Her hand caressed his head.

"Now, monsieur must sleep. I will go and warm some milk. Did you take your sleeping-draught.?"

"Yes. Don't go, Josephine. Not yet."

"I will come back. I will only be away a little time."

"Go on stroking my head. It aches."

When she left him to go downstairs he had grown calmer, and his shivering, childish panic had passed. Her face had a cool, calculating serenity. It was like the milk she poured into the small saucepan. She sat down by the stove, and a slow, enigmatic smile softened the pallor of her handsome, heavy countenance. Almost she felt like a mother heating up milk for her sick child. She had not had a child. What primitive emotion was permeating her precise plan! "What should I do without you, Josephine?" Exactement! She would see to it that he could not do without her. She would wrap man in the swaddling clothes of a deliberate and careful possessiveness. And who was there to interfere?

Sadness in the air, but no music. Tryte had a wireless set in his bedroom, but it worried him, for, unlike his sight, his hearing appeared to have become more sensitive. Grey clouds hurrying by, and bronze oak-leaves blowing across his window. Was it November or December? His head ached and felt heavy. Had he lost all sense of time, lying there looking at his helpless hand? Now and again he would make an effort to move those fingers, willing himself to get a message through to them, and as yet—in vain. The effort and the frustration exhausted him. He would relapse into depressed apathy.

What did it matter? What did anything matter?

When would his head stop aching?

It must be December. Drear, drear month, and those mournful lines of John Keats! Keats lay among the cypresses by the old Roman wall. The sun shone there. But did oak leaves fall in December? He wished the sun would shine. It seemed so dark and dead in England under that grey sky, dark and dead like his inward self. The sun might be shining at St. Martin. Blue sky, blue sea, not this inspissated gloom. He would like to go to St. Martin. Would he ever go again to that pleasant place where

colour was colour and not a smudge of neutral greys and greens. He must ask Moorhead. Josephine could take him. He was beginning to lean so completely upon that strong, calm creature.

Did Rowena Ravenstock know of his tragedy? Perhaps. But how could it matter to her? She was of a generation that despised the unfit and the unfortunate. It hurt him to think of Rowena. He tried not to think of her.

John Moorhead was troubled about Tryte. This particular disease could leave scars behind it, and its manifestations were various, nor was Tryte's case normal. But was any physical ill normal? The text-book case was for the benefit of students. You began to be wise when you shed your text-books, or ceased to regard them as the ultimate wisdom. Moorhead brought Sir Hercules Hammond to join in a consultation on the case, and Sir Hercules took a somewhat gloomy view. Obviously, there had been damage to nerve tissue, and time and treatment alone could prove how far the recovery would go.

"It is his mental state that worries me. It's very natural, of course, but this—apathy."

Sir Hercules had experienced other such cases. He belonged somewhat to the old, material school. The mental and motional changes were the results and the accompaniments of injured tissue, inevitable and obvious. Maxwell Tryte might be left with one half blind eye, and a right hand that would not regain its cunning. The mental manifestations would depend upon the patient's capacity to adapt himself to these disabilities.

Moorhead was not satisfied. He had come to believe that the thing called soul mattered, and that in the recovery of health the spirit had to stimulate the flesh.

So, when Tryte whimpered for sunlight and colour, as an artist should, Moorhead was in favour of a change of environment.

"When I can travel, John, can I go down south?"

"To your villa?"

"Yes. I can lie out in the sun there. God, you don't know how starved I feel for sunlight."

"I think it is a good idea. You could take a nurse with you."

"Nurses make me feel—senile. Madame Bertrand could convoy me."

"Yes," said Moorhead, "she could."

"When do you think I can begin to get up? I'm tired of being washed in bed."

"You were lucky, my lad, not to get bed-sores, thanks to good nursing. I think we will try you up next week. But remember, you'll be pretty weak on your legs."

"I expect so."

"And don't get depressed about it. A little at a time, and not too much of that."

Josephine Bertrand was waiting for the doctor, and she waited like one with a prerogative. Moorhead himself was beginning to question the significance of this French woman. Did she think herself indispensable? Did she propose to be indispensable? Her calm, milk-white solidity seemed to him to have gained a possessive emphasis during the last few weeks. Well, and why not? If she was kind and comprehending she might create the healing and comforting atmosphere that poor Tryte needed. She could be a pillow, and a bowl of milk. She had stability, strength, qualities that his patient lacked.

"Oh, madame, I want a word with you."

Josephine Bertrand had intended that he should confide in her.

"Yes, monsieur."

"I think a change of atmosphere would do Mr. Tryte good. He is rather hungering for sunlight, and that Riviera villa of his."

"Of course, monsieur. It is very natural."

"When he is stronger, and can travel I should like to get him down there. It would help to break the invalid complex. I suppose you would——?"

"I am ready to do anything, monsieur, arrange everything. He need have no responsibilities."

Moorhead looked at her keenly for a second.

"He needs kindness, patience. You understand?"

"Of course I understand, monsieur."

Moorhead drove away over wet roads that were lacquered with autumn leaves. A part of him attended to the business of driving, while the psychologist and the physician in him pondered more mysterious manifestations. Maybe a large part of his success as a healer was due to his human subtlety in analysing and assisting in the mystic dance of the emotions. Without emotion—no stimulus, no reaction. Moorhead travelled thus far with the Behaviourists, but he did not behold God in a Conditional reflex. Why—consciousness? Was it not rather absurd to deny consciousness when without it you would not be aware of the very thought-process you were elaborating? Moorhead was something of a mystic. Science was like a boy squatting at the foot of a wall, observing and counting the bricks and recording the pattern. Flemish Bond, English Bond, or bricklaying just as you please, but where did the wall end, and what was above it and beyond it?

Josephine Bertrand was the particular figure in his mind-picture. What was at the back of that heavily handsome and inscrutable face? Did the woman see herself as woman—with a sick man-child lying in her lap? Would it be good for his patient—now, to-morrow and the day after? Now—perhaps. The man-child Tryte had to go back into the nursery and be cared for by a capable nurse, but when the child grew back into man. Moorhead was not quite convinced of the disinterestedness of Josephine Bertrand. Not that he postulated perfect disinterestedness. That was perfection, and it did not exist in the world of men.

But what if the Bertrand woman was more mistress than matriarch, proposing to tie up Max Tryte in the silken threads of personal possessiveness? Moorhead swerved to avoid a wobbling cyclist, and then smiled inwardly at a somewhat improbable picture. Could anyone tie up Maxwell Tryte? The fellow was too agile, too restless, too clever.

XVII

ROWENA was bored with the weather.

To the young and to the less sensitive among the young the weather is weather only when it spoils a cricket match or forbids tennis, or thaws the ice just when you have cleaned up your skates, but Rowena was not quite the ordinary young woman. Had she been able to express it—as Maxwell Tryte might have expressed it, she could have said that “The English weather was always pulling down the blind on beauty,” for Rowena had stumbled suddenly upon a new and mysterious world. She was seeing things as she had not seen them before, how or why who shall say, but a new revelation of colour and of strange loveliness had come to her, as it comes to the few, with the light of inward illumination.

Who among her game-playing friends understood these things? Rowena, the tigress of the tennis-court, scribbling poetry! The divine discontent of a young woman who suddenly discovers herself short of self-expression, or of a form of self-expression that is beyond and above the hitting of a ball, made of her an enigma to her father. For fathers sometimes do become aware of daughterly disharmonies. Rowena had dropped her adjectives, and nothing was lousy. She was off her game at golf. She had the distant, brooding look of the sybil. She had ceased from being interested in sporting and domestic gossip.

Sir Everard was bothered. Could Rowena be in love? Her air of dark aloofness did not encourage questions.

Sir Everard took his troubles to his friend. Sam was a wise person, and so wise that he did not confess to Sir Everard that his daughter had chosen him as a father-confessor. Fathers should be treated gently. They have feelings like other mortals.

“Fact is, old man, I think Rowena has suddenly come into flower.”

“You mean she’s in love with some fellow?”

“Not in the least. It may be rather good for some fellow when

she does. Young girls—you know—are just full of themselves—until——”

“They fall in love?”

Samson smiled gently upon his friend.

“There are other ways. Hard buds opening. Why? Just because they must. Don’t you remember a time when you began to be aware of something more than a new waistcoat.”

Sir Everard stroked his nose.

“Well, yes. But—it was only when her mother came along.”

“That’s one way of becoming more than a semi-civilized lout. There are other ways. Life just gets you. You are a whole ship and a crew, not a little slob of an egoist paddling around in a dinghy.”

“So—you think it’s all right?”

“Dear old man—Rowena is seeing things and beginning to feel responsible, and Rowena.”

For, sitting in front of Valentine Samson’s fire in the dusk, she had said: “I don’t seem to be getting anywhere. Just drifting.”

“Strange new country, my dear, stranger than a golf-course!”

The Shakespearian phrases still held good, and Valentine Samson could look back upon most of them, and mock at himself for not having made the most of his chances. He was not yet the slippered pantaloon, but he could accuse himself—with a mischievous grin—of being peculiarly interested in his dinner. Did Tummy become King of the Sixties? Possibly. You reverted to the greedy boy, with the difference that your discrimination might have more distinction, and that liqueur brandy took the place of ginger beer. Then followed those passionate periods, with woman and self-expression in the ascendant. Later, a tired satiety might sit with you as a City Father, reading the *Financial Times*. Or, you might find solace in a garden, as Samson had found it among his fruit trees. He did not speak of happiness, that elusive, fleeting Will-of-the-Wisp. A man might be proud, strong, magnanimous, self-knowing, ruthless, but happiness was a flavour of the food for fools.

Uncle Sam, biting hard on his pipe, had remembered that he was thinking as man. Woman was different, or should be

different, if the sex in her was adequate. What did Rowena want? She did not know, and such not-knowing is part of youth, and perhaps the secret stimulus of its urge. And what could you say to the young when the illusion of some sacred flame was burning in youth's bowels? Cynicism? No, nor the placid resignation of a man who had experienced much, and to whom that much now meant nothing.

Rowena was Diana of the Crossways, and at her crossroads, looking out upon new, strange country, those glowing hills and dim deep valleys that might be called Romance. Romance was out of favour—or was it as dead as the dodo? The new young were realist, or thought themselves realist, yet Life might be having a joke with a whole generation, putting them in pyjamas and grey flannel trousers, only to tumble them back into a world of orange-blossoms, babies, nappies and prams. Valentine Samson had looked at Rowena sitting tensely self-questioning in front of the fire, dark-haired and dark-eyed, and with the fire-light in those same dark eyes.

"What do you want to do?"

The expected answer came to him.

"Uncle Sam, I don't know."

Just the blind, passionate urge manifesting; smoke from some unseen sacrificial fire.

In the middle of a dead and still December night Rowena woke as though some strange sound had struck a bell-note in her consciousness. What had her sleeping self heard? Not cats, not owls, for feline love did not function in the fog and frost of so dead a night. But Rowena was very much awake and sitting up in bed. Did some voice call to you at this dark hour? Had she been dreaming?

She could remember no dream.

Then there flashed before her in the dark inwardness of her startled self a picture. Maxwell Tryte's portrait of her looking down upon the sacred enclosure of the Ball Cult. Her arms were wrapped about her firm young breasts. Shades of Wimbledon, had Blondie forecast in that picture a revelation of the Rowena as she would be and as she was? Something shivered in her. It was as though a wind ruffled the leaves of her young self.

Maxwell Tryte sat on the edge of his bed. He had made his first attempt to stand, and his legs had given way under him, and returned him to the bed. He felt giddy, and vaguely sick, and his heart was fluttering under his ribs.

"Sorry, nurse. Can I wait a minute?"

Of course he could wait and take his time; that was part of the ritual. An armchair and a footstool were waiting for him by the bedroom fire; he had to cross only three yards or so of floor-space, but it seemed as vast as the Sahara. His flaccid right hand was tucked into his dressing-gown above the second button.

The nurse was tidying up the bed-table and watching him. She was ready to help if his legs still refused to function, but she believed in letting a patient try to find his own feet, flimsy though they might be. Even the successful taking of three unsponsored steps could serve as a stimulus.

Tryte made a second attempt, stood erect for some three seconds, and relapsed upon the bed.

"I feel like wet blotting-paper."

"Of course you do, my dear," said the nurse, who was Irish, "but every day and in every way——"

"I shall feel better and better."

"By wanting to."

Tryte smiled a thin little smile.

"I'll have another shot in a minute."

"If you can't, my dear, I'll——"

The door opened before she could complete the sentence. Josephine Bertrand had heard the "My dear," and even its vaguest implications were decisive. She was she. She looked at the poor thing posed upon the bed, and at the waiting chair, and her response was one of compassionate indignation.

"Nurse, how can you let monsieur—exhaust himself?"

She crossed to the bed, and putting an arm about the Maestro, almost lifted him up.

"Now, monsieur."

She was as strong as a man, and Tryte had the figure of a half-starved boy. In two seconds she had him in the chair, letting him down gently. She pushed the footstool under his feet, snatched the quilt from the bed, and spread it over him.

"There, monsieur, it was not so difficult—with a little help."
She fixed the nurse with a challenging, dark stare.

"You see?"

The nurse was simmering, and thinking her own thoughts, but she went on tidying the bed-table.

Maxwell Tryte was alone, sitting by the bedroom fire. The nurse had gone for an hour's airing, and she needed it after what she might have said and had not said to Madame. Interfering, histrionic female out to create an emotional impression! Tryte sat and blinked at the fire like a very young child in a cradle. This—somehow—had been a new experience of woman. Hitherto woman had been a vehicle, something to be possessed and enjoyed, but to be succoured and dominated by woman was novel to him. He had found it pleasant, and subtly elemental. A comfortable person—Josephine, and so capable and strong. The child in him cried: "Mother—mother."

For the first half hour he enjoyed his adventure out of bed. It symbolized a resurrection—after all those weary months. He sat and tried to move the fingers of his right hand, and for a moment he fancied that he had succeeded. Just a little creep of the fingers; no more. Then, as happens to those who have been devastatingly ill, a sudden utter weariness spilled itself upon him. Every part of him seemed to sag and cry out; his head began to ache; it felt too heavy for his neck.

Oh, to be back in bed! He felt incapable of getting out of the chair. There was no bell near him. How weak, how terribly weak he was. Would he ever be strong again? And Maxwell Tryte wept, soundlessly, like a poor cracked vessel exuding tears.

It was thus that Josephine Bertrand found him.

"Oh, Josephine, I'm—I'm so tired."

"Mon pauvre garçon."

She turned down the bedclothes, drew the coverlet away, gathered him up, and with effortless and handsome strength, carried him to the bed, and laid him in it. He shivered. He felt cold.

She drew the clothes over him.

"There, it is exhausting—the first getting-up."

"You are good to me, Josephine."

"Oh—la-la, monsieur, that is not difficult."

When the nurse returned from her hour's constitutional she found her patient back in bed, with a hot-water bottle at his feet and one to his tummy, and floating in warmth and relaxation after an exhausting experience. Josephine had found a handkerchief for him, and the aspirin, and a compassionate and caressing motherliness. Josephine had tucked him up with the hot-water bottles. Josephine had smoothed his hair and rubbed scent on his forehead. What strong, white hands were hers, nor were they professional hands.

"Well, well, my dear," said the nurse, "so you put yourself to bed all by yourself."

Tryte's smile was infantile.

"No, Madame helped me back."

"Oh, did she! Would you like a bottle?"

"I've got two, nurse."

"Also provided by Madame?"

"Yes."

The nurse left him to take off her hat and coat, and to reflect upon the activities of Josephine Bertrand. Was it part of the lady's plan to persuade the patient that professional attention was becoming superfluous? Not likely.

Max Tryte felt drowsy, warm and relaxed. The solace of surrender was upon him, and permeating it was the perfumed presence of French Josephine. When she had carried him to the bed he had hung in her arms like a child with his face against her bosom. Tryte lay with his eyes closed, conscious of strange, elemental feelings towards woman, a reaction according to Freud. Josephine was mother, a mother with midnight hair and eyes, a face like milk, a fragrant bosom, and calm yet caressing hands. The child in him had surrendered to her, but in the heart of this surrender a little flame was born. Child was man and man was desire; child lusted to lie in the maternal lap; man wished to lie with her, possess her in being possessed.

Rowena took the strange urge at its own peremptory behest. She did not drive, but walked along the leaf-strewn lanes and up

through the autumnal garden. When did autumn go and winter come? A gardener was cutting sheaves from a ghostly herbageous border. The day was still and misty, the grass greyed with dew. That red door confronted her. Why so red a door? That was Max of the decor days, not the Maxwell Tryte of tragedy.

She rang the bell. She expected the face of a maid, but she was met by the face of Josephine, for Josephine had sat on guard at her window.

"Bon jour, m'amselle."

Rowena was suddenly conscious of polite and implacable hostility.

"How is Mr. Tryte? I have come to inquire."

Madame was iced milk.

"He is still very weak, m'amselle."

"Is he seeing visitors?"

"No, m'amselle, not yet. Even a little talking tires him. The doctor does not wish him to be tired."

For a second or two they looked into each other's eyes, but it was Rowena who succumbed. A sudden, reddened, self-consciousness shamed her.

"I am sorry. Will you tell him I called?"

"Certainly, m'amselle."

The crimson door closed upon Rowena, nor was Maxwell Tryte told of her coming. Was it likely that Josephine Bertrand would tell him?

XVIII

CAPTAIN VALENTINE SAMSON was very much among the callers who could not be excluded. Mr. Mellaby had visited Max, and had gone away feeling shocked, and morally moved to an attitude of "I told you so." Tryte had lived the life, and life had bitten him with poisoned lips. Mr. Mellaby was of

the opinion that Maxwell Tryte was done for. Mr. Montefiore also travelled down to Stallards, and being a man of big bowels, was moved to compassion and active kindness. How deplorable that the master's hand should be covered with a glove and slung in a silk scarf!

Mr. Montefiore looked round the studio and down his Hebraic nose. Poor Max! Why not give him a show, something to cheer him, but beyond a few odd studies Mr. Montefiore saw nothing exhibitable but the three problem pictures which he had refused. Had he been right? Did the modern, pleasure-pursuing public resent having problems stuffed under its nose? Well, he might compromise. He could include those three pictures in a mixed exhibition, and if the public did not like them no great harm would be done. Mr. Montefiore could combine benignity with attention to his bank balance.

Much to Mr. Montefiore's surprise Maxwell Tryte was not willing to show those pictures. Almost he was petulant about it. But why?"

"I'll wait awhile, Monte. I like to look at them."

Was it that Maxwell Tryte knew the worst, and wished to treasure what might prove to be his last, characteristic creations?

"As you please, my dear Max."

"Kind of you to suggest it. I'm not quite myself just yet."

Mr. Montefiore rubbed his nose. He was sufficiently old to remember the Aubrey Beardsley period, and the brief and challenging career of that mordant genius, and in poor Max's case the tragedy might be repeating itself. Well, well, Max had made plenty of money, and his books would continue to sell. Moreover, even if he had been an extravagant devil Stallards and his villa at St. Martin were valuable properties.

Sundry other visitors came down to see Maxwell Tryte, some of them relics of his personal clique, but they discovered a new Max, a Max who had lost all his pyrotechnic playfulness and had become painfully inarticulate. These glib fellows bored him with their flattery. He had become blind to suggestions that ten pound notes were useful articles. He sat and gazed at these artificers with large and melancholy eyes, and speedily his court deserted him.

"Yes, poor old Max has gone ga-ga."

The bright world shrugged its shoulders.

Valentine Samson strolled over to Stallards twice a week, and was welcomed by both Max and Madame. Integrity can be saluted, especially so when it carries with it a profound comprehension of man's inner world and under-world. Josephine Bertrand was very polite to the Captain. She could not say as yet whether he was friend or foe, but even integrity can be persuaded that a petticoat has its virtues.

Max was able to hobble about with a stick, and that gloved right hand of his moved Samson to compassion. They would sit in the studio together, Max on the couch, the sailor in his favourite attitude, straddling a chair with his arms resting on the back of it. Strange contrasts they were, and yet to Maxwell Tryte Valentine Samson brought what he described as mountain air, clarity, comprehension. The sailor's taut figure and clear-cut and cleanly face were stimulating to a man who was feeling profoundly sick in soul, for Maxwell Tryte was beginning to divine the more inward things that had happened to him. The colour had been bleached out of his temperament. There was fog in his brain.

There were times when he was miserably afraid. What sort of stranger had manifested in the place of the old familiar self? It was as though he had slept and wakened to find himself other than himself, dull and confused and uncreative. Even the command of language had gone from him, all the old bright glibness. He was hesitant. Almost, he stammered.

And here was this old sailor, with a keen face that was still youthful, and his sharp, wise eyes, sitting there smoking his pipe. Strength, reassuring strength, and an utter absence of make-believe. Tryte, in his dreadful mental loneliness, and with a sense of being adrift on strange and uncharted waters, began to discover in this ship-master a pilot and a father confessor.

He said: "Aren't you bored with me?"

Came the reply: "I never go where I am bored."

Tryte's unhappy and bothered eyes seemed to fill with wet light.

"What is the sin against one's Holy Ghost? Self-pity."

Samson was looking at one of the pictures.

"Just a form of soul-sickness. A man can talk it out of himself."

"To some other fellow?"

"Why not?"

"Without being ordered a dozen strokes with the cat?"

"One does that to one's own back—my lad—sometimes. A sick body may mean a sick soul, but not for ever and ever."

So, Tryte talked and in talking found strange relief, almost as women do. If there was such a thing as a soul was it not peculiar that a drug or a bug could make or mar it? Did not that suggest that the ego was material, when a bacillus could transform it, or a sleeping-draught put despair and thoughts of suicide to sleep?

He said: "I feel I have a stranger in my house. The man called Maxwell Tryte is no longer—I. A nightmare feeling. I wake up at night and sweat and shiver. Blue funk about the future."

Samson bit hard on his pipe, his eyes fixed upon distant things. Blue funk? Was it not understandable? To find yourself in fragments, and a new strange self hawering at the wheel.

"Something to fight, my lad, something to struggle with."

Tryte looked at his helpless hand.

"I don't feel any fight left in me."

"That's death. Don't believe it. Man must fight things in himself, if nothing else."

"Why should he? Does it matter? If he is just a mess of tissue—at the mercy of a bug or a drug?"

"Think so? That's the devil and damnation. I'm not a padre person, but I do believe there is meaning in life."

"Because you have come out on top of it?"

"There have been times when I've been near the bottom. Had to sweat and pray."

Tryte looked startled.

"Prayer. Do you mean to say—you pray?"

Samson nodded.

"Now—and every day?"

"I do."

"To whom and what?"

"To a kind of presence I feel about me. One's not anthropomorphic—you know—these days."

"And does it help?"

"It does. I suppose the clever people call it auto-suggestion. Words, words, words. We get bogged in words. Language has such utter limitations. We make noises and call it wisdom. Why, damn it, man, does not the infinite complex cunning of life prove something? We're just kids babbling A, B, C."

Tryte lay silent, staring at the ceiling.

"Wish I could feel like that?"

"Why shouldn't you?"

"My dear sir, I'm a modern."

"And I belong to the Mosaic period! Why, man alive, you—an artist—ought to be the very person—to see beyond the merely physical. Look at those pictures of yours. Could physics or bio-chemistry create conscious concepts such as those?"

Tryte closed his eyes, and a little sardonic smile wavered on his lips.

"Dear Uncle Sam, I am—no longer—an artist. A bug bit me, and I ceased to function. Doesn't that upset you——?"

"Rot, my lad. Fiddle strings break, but the musician goes on. New strings to your fiddle. Besides, even bacilli or cocci—have their uses."

"How?"

"Why, by chastening a man's conceit, and persuading him to dust his breeches, and climb again——"

"To higher forms of consciousness?"

"Don't be ironic. The East is sometimes wiser than the West, my lad."

"Prescribing Yoga, Uncle?"

"It's an idea."

Josephine Bertrand's higher consciousness was both practical and subtle. Her plan had shaped itself, and appeared as mild as mother's milk. The Maestro should give up absinthe!

She contrived to be in evidence whenever Captain Samson's visit came to an end, and was waiting in the hall for him. She tried no caressing voice upon the sailor, but stood before him as

the woman of common-sense whose devotion knew its place. No dipping of flags here, no emotional salutes. Josephine was wise; she knew her man and was plain Bertrand to him.

"How do you find the master to-day, Monsieur le Capitaine?"

She was careful to define her attitude to Genius. She might be a plain and simple woman, but she could both salute and serve.

"Rather better, madame, I think."

"It is tragic, monsieur, that poor hand of his. And he is so triste. Can one wonder?"

Samson was completely neutral in his feelings towards Madame Bertrand. Maybe she fooled him as she hoped to do.

"I am afraid it is a question of time and patience, madame."

"I agree, monsieur. I am so glad that you came to see him. But does not monsieur think——?"

She paused, and her hesitation suggested that she was not presuming to presume.

"Yes, madame?"

"A change might help. If he could travel to St. Martin. This gloomy England in winter. What does monsieur think?"

Samson was putting on a scrf. He was one of those hardy people who eschew overcoats.

"Yes, it might be beneficial."

"The sun shines there. Monsieur Tryte is so fond of the sun. Would monsieur suggest it?"

"Yes, I think I might, madame."

"Pardon my frankness, monsieur, but my master—has so high an opinion—of monsieur's advice. I do not presume to——"

Samson gave her a keen, appraising glance, but she met it with placid solidity.

"Has the doctor said anything?"

"I am not sure, monsieur. I do not like to suggest—to people who are wiser than I am."

"I'll have a word with him."

"Thank you, monsieur."

She opened the red door for Valentine Samson, putting into the act the respectful gratitude of a simple woman who knew her place.

She did.

Was it no more than a coincidence that on the day when Dr. Moorhead gave it as his opinion that Maxwell Tryte would be fit to travel in a week or two, Max discovered that he could move the fingers of his right hand. It was a dastardly day, a smudge of a day, with sleet and a north-east wind, and Maxwell Tryte had faced the morning in a mood of restless depression. He had pottered about in the studio, experimenting with his left hand, only to be tantalized by the elementary muck—as he called it—that his untrained hand produced. Then, Moorhead had come in time for lunch, drunk 1920 Hock, and given his blessed verdict.

Sun, colour, clear skies, the sea peacock-blue under the pines. There had been a resurgence of the *elan vital* in Maxwell Tryte. No, it was not the wine alone, but the hope vibrant in that verdict, and the prospect of change, movement, something happening. When Moorhead had gone Tryte had wandered back into the studio, and stood looking with new excitement at those three pictures. Sunlight, colour, life! Perhaps he again would paint, and scribble naughty stories. The very blood seemed to tingle in him. In his excitement he moved towards the central picture. He wanted to touch it. And then it was that he realized that he had put out that gloved and master-hand.

The shock held him rigid. He looked down at the hand. He was conscious of no effort. Were those fingers moving? They were, ever so little, slight flexion followed by just as slight an extension. A light spread over Maxwell Tryte's face. He pulled off the glove, and looked and looked. Yes, the movement was actual and convincing.

Madame Bertrand was on the stairs when she heard him calling. "Josephine, Josephine."

Was it anguish or joy that she heard? She came down the remaining stairs with solid swiftness.

"What is it, monsieur? I am here."

He was standing in the doorway, eyes shining.

"Josephine—I can move my fingers."

She looked from his face to his hand. She saw.

"Oh, monsieur, the good God be thanked. I have prayed that this might happen."

He believed her. He was a man in an ecstasy.

"Look, see."

"I see, monsieur."

And, suddenly she took his hand between hers, bent, and kissed the fingers almost as a woman kisses the fingers of her child. Max was head up, exultant. This warm caress!

"Josephine, I am so happy."

"I too, monsieur."

XIX

MADAME BERTRAND wrote letters.

She had said: "Do not worry yourself, monsieur; I will arrange everything."

Maxwell Tryte was to be wrapped in cotton-wool, and wool that was scented. He was to repose like a peach in a box, and at the moment he was liking the part. He rested in the maternal lap, and took sustenance from the benignant bosom, and was warmed by faint flushes of desire.

Madame Bertrand wrote letters, explanatory and very confidential letters. One was to an elder sister, a widow, who lived at Nice, and the elder sister had a daughter, a very plain young woman, Madame and Mademoiselle Daudet. Madame was to act as cook, Mademoiselle as maid. Roberto was to remain the gardener, for Roberto was a pliable and well oiled person.

But letters were not sufficient. Josephine would speed south in person, insure that everything was in order, and then hurry back to conduct the Maestro to the wool-lined scented nest.

Tryte was feeling happy, and he let her go. The first, tentative movements of those paralysed fingers was like the stirring of the sap in spring.

"Monsieur must take great care. He must not tire himself. Monsieur must promise."

"I will be bon garçon, Josephine."

She left stringent orders behind her. Monsieur Tryte must not be exhausted by visitors. Monsieur le Capitaine could be regarded as the one exception. Madame had taken much trouble to propitiate her English staff; she had told them that their services would be retained on generous board-wages. They could consider it a holiday. Their dismissal could be completed later when Monsieur Tryte and the Villa Violet were coming under Madame's control. The cook and the maids were mute in Madame's presence, but they had things to say behind her back. What was the Frenchie's game? The modern servant is not imbued with the spirit of devotion. Madame appeared to them to be much too devoted.

"Got him in her pocket—she has."

One of the maids giggled.

"What about—in her bed?"

"Don't be vulgar," said the cook.

So, Madame departed, completely French in black, to travel first-class at the Maestro's expense. It was good to be back in France, oh—very good. So shrewd and logical a country, this, and so competent in its feeling for the franc. Madame Bertrand had a quite nice little sum invested in the Funds. Savings—at the Maestro's expense. Well, had she not earned them? She was travelling direct to Nice to a conference with her sister. It was to be a very personal and domestic business. Pauline was to be instructed in the part she was to play. Monsieur was to be made so comfortable that he would not desire anything else, and so long as he continued in that state he would remain comfortable. Yes, a plump and petted invalid, a man-baby. He would never be the Maxwell Tryte of his halcyon days. Oh, no, he must always need the support and caresses of Madame's capable hands. What—after all—was art? It was of no supreme importance provided you had the wisdom to cherish the financial assets you still possessed. The Villa Violet could be a perfect and feathered nest for a bird whose plumage would never be more than down. And the grand finale? Josephine Bertrand kept that secret to herself.

It happened that Captain Samson suffered the indignity of being kept in bed for a week with a feverish cold. He would not

call it influenza. Damn it, a fit man should not tolerate silly frailties of the flesh. He was apt to be short tempered when the body played tricks. And Rowena found him smoking a pipe, although it made him cough and splutter.

"I call that—weak minded of you, Uncle."

"No, strong minded, my dear, refusing to propitiate the flesh. And smoke is antiseptic."

"Your poor throat doesn't seem to think so."

"Light up, and don't preach, young woman."

"And add to the fug?"

"Is there such a thing?"

"No, not with your window open like that. Don't you feel cold?"

"Better shut it, if you do."

"We are being tetchy, aren't we? I came to play the sweet woman."

"Horrible product. Sugar and insincerity. Beware of sweet women and misunderstood men."

"Mostly married, aren't they?"

"Invariably."

"Isn't there anything I can do for you, Uncle?"

Samson smiled at her.

"When a young thing troubles to visit an old fuster, the act is a deed of grace, and a refreshment."

"Thank you. But——"

"There is one thing, but it is not exactly your pigeon."

"What is it?"

"I'm troubled about poor Tryte. I have been seeing him twice a week. He is in the state of being what I call on the knife-edge. No poise. Easily pushed the wrong way."

Rowena gazed thoughtfully at her cigarette.

"You mean—you want me to deputize? Wouldn't it be—rather flagrant? Besides——"

"Why this shyness?"

"A confession, Uncle. I did try to see him, and the French Madame turned me down."

Samson looked at her sharply. Rowena rebuffed by Tryte's housekeeper, and feeling a little sensitive about it!

"You mean she wouldn't let you in?"

Rowena laughed, but her laughter had an edge to it, and the laugh was against herself.

"Yes. Somewhat the pose of the virtuous and protective matron. Complete repulse of the designing female."

Samson had taken such a pull at his pipe that his mucous membrane protested. For half a minute he did nothing but cough, but the interlude had its uses. Rowena, sitting there jiggling a foot, found a passion for frankness coming to her rescue.

"I'm going to take your pipe away, Uncle."

"No need, my dear. I surrender. And just why——?"

"I'll tell you. Most unmaidenly of me, but I had an urge. I thought I could help Max, and that Max might help me. That picture of his, you know."

Samson had laid his pipe aside. He was wearing his battle-action face.

"I see. And that other picture?"

"Which one?"

"La Belle France. 'I'm just beginning to wonder whether Max did not see—— Damn it, I can't quite express—what——'"

"I'm not given to blushing, Uncle."

"Well, when Max painted the dame in the mirror, did the subconscious in him divine—well—the designing, mercenary hag? What's your feeling——?"

"I don't quite know, Uncle. She made me feel a self-conscious chit."

"Did she, by Jove! Somehow I haven't got the Bertrand woman in the right perspective. Bit of an enigma. Why not try again?"

"Uncle!"

"Feeling head in air?"

"Rather so."

"My dear, we are all so damned self-regarding. Teeter about on high heels, when we ought to——"

"You think I'm funkng? No soft emotion here, but there is something about Max and his craft——"

"That gets you."

"Yes."

"Well, try again. Is there anything abnormal in a girl and a man having things to say to each other?"

"I suppose not."

"Well, get off the high heels. You can say that I sent you."

Rowena did as she was bidden. After all, it was not a drooping, die-away, blushful age, and young gentlewomen did not lower their lashes and simper. Uncle Sam was right. Look life straight in the face and steer straight for the enemy. Rowena got out the Morris and drove to Stallards, determined that she would not be fobbed off a second time by any French woman. The maid who answered the bell and opened the red door to her happened to be a Medworth girl, and her brother worked in the garden at Tanwood.

"Hullo, Maisie! Didn't know you were here."

Rowena was popular with the people. She might be a dark and striding Diana, but there was a fresh frankness about her, the supple ease of breeding.

"I was in London, Miss. It didn't suit me."

"Same here, Maisie. How is Mr. Tryte? Captain Samson hasn't been able to come and see him."

"Oh, he's better, Miss, I think. Would you like to see him?"

"Go and ask him, Maisie. He may not be feeling like visitors."

"I will, Miss. I'm sure he would like to see you."

Maisie gave Rowena an admiring look, for was not Miss Rowena Ravenstock the best looking girl in that part of the country? And likeable too. Spoke to you as though you were a human being. What was more, the introduction of a visitor and so lovely a lovely, would be a slap for that interfering French dame.

"Will you wait in the drawing-room, Miss. There is a fire. I think Mr. Tryte's in the studio."

"Thank you, Maisie."

Maisie went upon her errand. She opened the studio door softly, so softly that Maxwell Tryte did not hear her. He was lying on the couch, with a hand over his eyes, sunk deep in a moment of profound boredom and depression.

"Excuse me, sir."

He was startled. He struggled up.

"What is it?" and his voice was peevish.

"Miss Ravenstock, sir. Called to see how you are. Would you care——?"

Maxwell Tryte's face seemed to come alive.

"Miss Ravenstock. Oh, show her in, Maisie."

"Yes, sir."

Rowena was prepared to see a man who had been desperately ill, but not this attenuated, bearded boy who limped down the studio to meet her. Inwardly she was shocked, while trying to keep such feeling from showing in her face. Was this the gaillard, cheeky Max of world repute, this little, half-starved creature with great luminous, eager eyes, and one crumpled hand? He seemed to have grown younger, not older as she might have expected, even younger than she was, as though the child had re-manifested in the man.

"Well, this is kind of you."

He put out his left hand, and the smile he gave her was not the old smile.

"Excuse the left paw. The other is still in hospital."

Some instinct made her give him her own left hand. What had her first reaction been, one of slight repulsion? But when his left hand came out she was conscious of sudden, swift compassion.

"Uncle Sam sent me. He is laid up."

Instantly she knew that she had said the wrong thing, for his pale face winced. It had become a much more sensitive face, and somehow it made her think of tissue paper, so easily crumpled by emotion.

"That's a good excuse, isn't it?" and she made herself laugh.

"May I sit down?"

He made a movement towards a Louis Quinze chair, appeared to hesitate, and in doing so glanced at one of the pictures. Josephine Bertrand had posed for her portrait in that very chair.

"No, rather too formal, Miss Ravenstock."

Again she laughed.

"So—is the method of address. Why not——?"

His large, luminous eyes were fixed upon her face.

"May I?"

"Well, the bold bad jig has suggested it."

He smiled, and she saw that the movements of the facial muscles were unequal. His eyes, bright though they were, gave her the impression of being short-sighted.

"Thank you, Rowena."

She made him a little curtsey.

"Thank you, Max."

Then, she sat down on the sofa, looked about her, and tried not to feel most strangely flurried.

"I see—you still have the pictures."

He had taken the Louis Quinze chair.

"Yes, quite household property, domestic decoration."

"Aren't you going to show them?"

"Some day—perhaps. I am going south very soon."

"To St. Martin?"

"Yes."

"How jolly. Sun—and all that."

There was a pause, one of those difficult interludes when two people are aware of mutual self-consciousness. Something in Rowena rebelled. Why make conversation which was mere polite patter?

Her head went up. Her eyes seemed to flash.

"When are you going to begin painting again?"

His glance wavered to his right hand.

"Oh, perhaps—never."

She drew a deep breath.

"You must not talk like that. You have got to paint again."

Her directness seemed to startle him. His mouth fell open. There was a kind of anguish in his eyes.

"Well, you see, this wretched hand of mine."

"That won't stop you, Max."

"No? But is it worth while? Does it matter?"

She rose with one swift movement, and walked across to the central picture.

"Do you know what you did, Max, with that?"

"No."

"Made—me—think. Gave me something that I had not got before."

"You, Rowena?"

"Yes, me—— I should say—I."

She turned to look at La Belle France, perhaps because after that flash of frankness she wanted to get her breath, and to suppress another surge of self-consciousness. Drat it, could one escape never from that posing little ego that mocked one like a malicious child? What were those words of Uncle Sam's? "Teetering about on high heels. Get off the high heels." Yes, but one also could be horribly flat-footed. And what was he thinking? That she had come here to vamp him? Let him dare! But she continued to stand at gaze, temporizing, hardly aware of the picture before her.

Suddenly she heard his voice, and it was a different voice.

"Don't look at that one, Rowena."

It was more of a warning than a plea. She turned about and faced him.

"Why not?"

"Not after that other one. And thank you for what you said——"

He was looking up at her steadfastly, as he might have looked at a model, but seeing her not as mere figure, but as a picture that might discover him to himself.

She was conscious of a moment of self-confusion.

"I meant it, Max, every word——"

"Yes, I know you did. I have been a rather craven sort of idiot. Let's talk. Somehow I feel that I can tell you things."

And suddenly she was radiant.

"And I—you."

ONE thing he had not confessed to her, that he had been given spectacles to wear, and that he had plucked them off and tucked them into the couch cushions before she had seen him. He groped into the depths and recovered them. How nearly she had sat upon those spectacles!

What harmless vanity! He could laugh over it and at himself, and putting on the glasses he went and surveyed himself in a studio mirror. Yes, they made him look like a starved little owl, but some of the old gaillard spirit had flickered up in him. She had brought youth and passion and enthusiasm back into the world, and turning from the mirror he went to look at his picture of her, and suddenly he knew that he was looking at her as he had looked at no other woman. She had mystery for him; every fragment of her had mystery. She was no mere figure of flesh to be lusted after and possessed. He was afraid of her, terribly afraid. Her young dark dignity belonged to the world of beauty, a sensitive proud beauty. Good God, was he feeling reverent towards woman, he—the colourful hedonist? He smiled at the picture. Well, why not? Had he not lacked all reverence, the fear that passeth understanding?

What was the test? That he would fear to hurt her. But was he not dreaming impossible things? Of what significance could he be to a young huntress, a game-playing Diana with the young moon in her hair? And yet——? Had they not talked together as they had not talked before? She had become to him like the dark girl in the picture.

Turning to glance at the other picture, he was confronted by a supreme contrast, and it accused him. Josephine Bertrand, the French woman and the hag. He was conscious of self-nausea. Had he so lost his sense of the mystery of things that he had fallen to feeling——? Fallen? What an antique phrase! But he could not shrug it off. Youth had been with him, splendid tantalizing youth, daring him to think upwards instead of wallowing in some sex-splurge.

She had said: "I will write to you, if you will write to me."

And how would he write to her? In a way he had never written before. With wonder and perhaps with the humility of humour.

But he would see her again before he left for the south.

Madame was back at Stallards, a well satisfied and confident Madame. She asked questions and she received one answer that angered her.

"Any visitors?"

Maisie was pleased to be pert.

"Yes, Miss Ravenstock."

Madame looked black.

"Indeed! I told you——"

Maisie was still more pert.

"Do you think it's my business—or yours—to turn away a young lady like Miss Rowena?"

It was not, and Josephine Bertrand was sufficiently shrewd to concede the point, and to pour honey upon Maisie's pertness. Miss Ravenstock was—of course—an exception, a very charming English Miss, and had not the Maestro painted her portrait?

Madame said to herself: "Calm yourself, Josephine. Your portrait shall be the one that will matter to him. He is a sick man, and a sick man clings to his nurse."

To Maxwell Tryte she was the Land of Canaan, overflowing with milk and honey. Everything was prepared; everything was in order. The Villa Violet could show some flowers, even in December. The winter rains were over, and Monsieur's grass was a green as in England, but there was sunlight upon it, and the flickering shadows of the olive trees. Monsieur could bask in the sun. God and Josephine Bertrand would preside in the heavens.

She observed him behind her enigmatic cheerfulness, and was challenged by the impression that he was more man and less the sick child than when she had left him. She noticed that his right hand was less helpless, and that might be a warning to her. The time was ripe for his comfortable incarceration. It would not do

for him to be too well before her plan had come into full fruition.

Moreover, his attitude to her was more that of the Maestro of a year ago, familiar and yet individual; she was his house-keeper, indispensable as a provider of domestic smoothness, an efficient head and hands. Her feeling was that he had escaped from her a little during this interlude, and that the web might have to be respun.

"And how is St. Martin, Josephine? As full of confectionery as ever?"

"Yes, the patisseries are open, monsieur."

"Do you know, Josephine, I can see you presiding over a patisserie shop."

She held herself with dignity.

"I prefer to serve monsieur."

"So do I, Josephine, so do I. Well, well, it will be good to be back in the sun."

Two days before he left Rowena came with Uncle Sam to see him. The duality of the visit gave Madame no chance to obstruct the natural occasion. Miss Ravenstock had driven Monsieur le Capitaine in her car, a nice excuse—perhaps, but completely legitimate.

Captain Samson was in his most cheerful yet north sea mood. England in winter! Well, you went soft in the south, and the timber in you did not harden without cold weather and a rest. And how was the hand? Better. Paint brush and pen would soon be in use again. Uncle Sam was decisive upon that point.

He held the conversation; he appeared to be in a very positive mood, perhaps because Rowena was in a silent one, and strange to say silence suited her. She and Uncle Sam had enjoyed or not enjoyed a very brief and intimate conversation in the car, and for once the Father Confessor had had the worst of it. Feeling responsible he had given advice, and it had not been accepted.

"Beware of restlessness, my child. It may push you over the cliff."

"Such as?"

"You know what I mean. Ages and interests and atmospheres may differ."

"You are in the wrong pulpit, Uncle. Foot-faulting is not one of my sins."

"Well, well, I have done my duty."

"Dear old Nelson. You can turn the blind eye."

Madame, carrying in tea in person in order to take a look at the party and to appraise its tendencies, saw that the master was not wearing his spectacles, and to Madame the shedding of those giglamps was not without significance. Miss Rowena Ravenstock was not among the Rosalies of this world, and more dangerous in her possibilities. Would Monsieur Max have discarded his spectacles for any Rosalie? The Maestro had always been vulnerable to women. There was yet another inference that was not altogether pleasing to Josephine Bertrand. Monsieur Max did not feel sensitive about his spectacles in her presence.

She was—for a moment—tempted to remind him that he should be wearing his glasses, but her shrewdness pushed malice aside. With a man like Monsieur Max it was better to tread gradually and softly.

Samson was gallant to Josephine.

"Soon be back in La Belle France, madame."

"Oui, monsieur."

"Take care of this naughty boy, and see that he takes his medicine."

Madame smiled graciously.

"I will, Monsieur le Capitaine."

Yes, the Maestro should take his medicine.

Tryte hobbled out to see them off, minus any overcoat, and was reproved by Rowena.

"Go in at once. It's beastly cold."

He liked being reproved by her.

"Yes, oh—queen."

She gave him a dark deep look.

"You should be slapped for such——"

For the moment he was the old, quick Max.

"For saluting the crown? Then—may I be slapped often."

He saw her smile, a smile that might have been for him alone.

"Then—obey the Queen, and don't be silly."

She slipped into her seat, and Samson poked a head out of the near window.

"Good luck, my lad, and come back with the whole packing-case of pictures."

The frail face winced, and Rowena's voice came from behind the sailor's head.

"Go in, Max. Haven't I told you?"

His eyes became luminous.

"Obedient man salutes you."

Never had Maxwell Tryte felt so tired as he felt towards the end of that long journey, though every luxury a *de luxe* train could give him had been his. Madame had bribed an attendant to bring the Maestro his meals in his own *salon lits*. She had produced flasks of hot milk and of brandy; she had examined the blankets and the sheets to satisfy herself that they were not damp, and persuaded the car-attendant to fill a hot bottle for her. Her assiduity was—perhaps—a little too emphatic, and helped to tire poor Blondie, especially so when she visited him—or rather—inspected him in the middle of the night, and woke him just when he had dropped off into a deep sleep.

"I'm all right, Josephine. Don't worry."

When she left him to the rumble of the wheels, those words of Valentine Samson's mingled themselves with the rhythm of the rails. It just happened so. "Never marry a French woman. She'll pester you for sex-expression at all times and in all places, when you are with book, when you are cleaning your teeth." And Max laughed a little, tired laugh. As if Josephine could be like that! She was just a damned good sort, was Josephine, largely maternal, and completely capable; m'yes, and sometimes a little too much so.

He fell asleep again thinking of Rowena.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached St. Martin. A sardonic sun had absented himself, and it was blowing and raining. The palms on the station platform were hair on end and full of expostulatory chatter. Max had a headache, so foul a headache that he felt capable of being sick. He had to be helped

out of the train, and Madame saw to that. Almost she bore him along with her to the waiting taxi, and having tucked him in, returned to attend to the luggage. She was terse and imperious with the customs officials and the porter. Yes, the luggage belonged to the great Monsieur Maxwell Tryte, and Monsieur had been very ill and was exhausted after the journey, and she would thank the officials to be expeditious. There was nothing to declare but a small bottle of cognac which had helped Monsieur Tryte through the journey. She was La Belle France personified, ordering mere man about, and authority surrendered to her and chalked all the baggage without examination. She gave the porter a tip that made him glare at it and her. It was not the sort of tip Monsieur Tryte would have given him.

They drove down to the Plage and along it. The sea was grey; so was the sky; the wind blew, the palms shrieked like disorderly women with their hair ablow, angry hag-trees. Maxwell Tryte sat and looked at this depressing scene with tired and melancholy eyes. He shivered. His eyes ached like his head.

Madame sat beside him. She was indignant with the weather. "Quelle sottise!"

He said sadly: "Oh—to be in bed."

Assuredly this was not the home-coming he had expected. In the garden of the Villa Violet the cypresses were bent into shapes of sickles by the wind. A little torrent was running down the steep drive. The garden, lashed by the wind, seemed to cower under a drenched grey cloak.

"Quelle sottise!" said Josephine Bertrand.

The good Roberto was there with a sack over his head, and teeth shining white in a wet face. Roberto was a kind creature; he was glad to see monsieur, for Roberto was not liking the new menage.

"Hallo, Robert——"

"Welcome, monsieur."

Madame exercised authority.

"Monsieur is very tired. You will carry in the luggage, Roberto."

Tryte tottered out of the taxi, and his legs gave way. But for

Roberto, he would have subsided in a puddle. The Italian caught him, and shaking the sack from his head, carried Tryte in. Roberto's round white face was suffused with compassion. Dark eyes and white teeth gleamed.

"Good man, Roberto. I've been very ill. And such a long train journey."

The big Italian looked as though he had a bambino in his arms. Poor gentleman. So small now, and those spectacles!

A woman in black was waiting just within the door, and Tryte had a passing glimpse of her face as Roberto carried him in. It suggested the face of a mummy, the skin like old parchment, the eyes two black beads, the mouth almost lipless, and to the tired child in Maxwell Tryte it was a sinister face, a fitting countenance to close the weary pilgrimage of a weary day.

Roberto helped his master to undress. The Italians are a kind people, and Roberto had a gardener's hands, hands that can touch a flower with gentleness. Madame, bustling in, found Roberto on his knees, removing Tryte's shoes. Mr. Max was sitting on the bed.

"We can manage, Josephine."

Her great black eyes considered the situation, and accepted it. Roberto was a harmless creature; he could be suffered to play the valet. She closed the door on them.

Roberto's fingers were busy now with buttons.

"Who is the—woman, Roberto?"

"That was Madame Daudet, sir. She will cook for you."

Tryte's tired face pulled a faint grimace.

"Cook! Looks like—vinegar."

Roberto showed white teeth.

At last Max was in his pyjamas and snuggling into the bed. A hot bottle had been placed in it. He sighed and closed his eyes. Roberto stood looking at him.

"Does monsieur need his—spectacles?"

Tryte had forgotten to take them off.

"No, take them away, Roberto. And tell them I don't want to be disturbed."

Roberto departed, carrying his master's shoes with him. He cleaned Tryte's shoes.

Madame received the message and made a secret moue over it. Hot milk laced with cognac was ready, and monsieur should take a sleeping-draught. She entered the Maestro's room with an air of benign authority.

"Hot milk, monsieur."

Tryte was well down in the bed.

"I don't want anything, Josephine."

"Monsieur must drink the milk. And he should take something for the headache."

"Put it down, Josephine. Bed is what I want."

"Of course, monsieur. Monsieur will take some dinner—later."

Tryte thought of the mummy-faced woman, the parchment-covered skeleton in black.

"No, I'll just go to sleep."

"I will bring monsieur his dinner later."

Tryte muttered a silent "Damn, leave me alone, woman," and turned over on the other side. Madame hesitated, shrugged, and left him.

Maxwell Tryte lay still for a little while. Then he floundered up and locked his door.

XXI

A DR. LOVIEBOND was the English doctor at St. Martin, a bird of passage with the seasons, who, when the spring was over, flew to Vichy, and from Vichy to Dinard. Moorhead had written to Dr. Loviebond about his patient, and so distinguished a patient was very much to Loviebond's fancy. Maugre his name he was a very capable physician with much experience of the idle and the wealthy and their particular ills. At his hospital Edward Loviebond had been called by the

irreverent Love-a-Duck, and Wedding Night and what not, but he had lived down such lewdness, and on one or two occasions fought it down, for, like many mild men he was capable of sudden violent indignation when the provocation became too outrageous.

But, to hark back a few hours. Madame had duly arrived with the Maestro's dinner, to find the door locked, and to be brought to a displeased standstill with the tray partly supported by her opulent figure. She frowned, she listened, and to her came the sound of exultant snoring. Madame considered the situation and its implications. Should she force the Maestro's dinner upon him or leave him sleeping? She decided on the latter course.

But that locked door was a challenge to her. The locking of doors was to be her prerogative, and the fact that Monsieur Max had locked his gave her food for reflection. She carried the tray back to the kitchen and to her sister and her niece, who was an unpleasant replica of her mother.

"Monsieur is asleep. I thought it better not to disturb him."

Yet, the incident provided Josephine Bertrand with an inspiration. Did she not know that the Maestro's mental state was not quite normal? And the mentally sick should not be permitted to lock doors. Monsieur Max, in one of those moments of weariness and profound depression, might do something sudden and desperate. A child of impulse might swallow too much sleeping-draught.

Early next morning Roberto was sent off to Dr. Loviebond's with a letter. It was brief and enigmatic. It requested Dr. L. to call and see Mr. Maxwell Tryte at the earliest opportunity.

Dr. Loviebond read, came, and was met by Madame, a very grave and dignified Madame. She wished to have a little conversation with the doctor before he saw his patient. She shepherded Dr. Loviebond into the highly-decorative salon which opened on the loggia.

Dr. Loviebond was a man of neutral tints as to hair, eyes, and temperament. Tall and spare, and always very correctly dressed, he was a model of hygiene and suavity. He had a limp hand, a

quiet voice, and a slightly receding chin, and was quite unprovocative to healthy women, but soothing to sick ones.

"Please sit down, monsieur."

Dr. Loviebond sat down, and so did Madame. Dr. Loviebond questioned the particular tableau; Madame appraised this tallow-haired, pale-eyed man, and her impression was that the doctor was a person whom it would be easy to put in your pocket. Dr. Loviebond was asking himself what this formidable and rather brow-beating lady had to do with his patient. Certainly, Mr. Maxwell Tryte had a playful reputation, but this solid and swarthy Juno did not suggest playfulness.

"I think I had better warn Monsieur. Monsieur Tryte has been very ill. It has changed him."

Dr. Loviebond nodded. In his profession he had become an expert listener, but had some of his patients been able to hear his inward comments, they might have felt chastened. People might think it easy to fool this pale, neutral man, and Dr. Loviebond listened and let them prattle. A quiet listener hears most of the music and the news.

Madame went on to say that his illness had affected poor Mr. Tryte's brain. She tapped her forehead meaningly and gave Dr. Loviebond a deep, black glance. Yes, she was worried about monsieur. He had such moods of depression, and was so emotional, and when in so dejected and tragic a mood—might he not——? Dr. Loviebond, having listened sufficiently, thought it time to exercise professional authority.

"Yes, quite so. I have received a complete description of the case from his London doctor. I should like to see Mr. Tryte."

He rose, but Madame remained seated.

"One moment, monsieur——"

Loviebond waited.

"Monsieur Tryte should not be left alone too much, don't you think so? Nor should he be allowed to lock his door."

"I think, madame, it is for me to judge—when I have seen my patient. May I ask—what madame's position is?"

She rose to the challenge, and stood before him with dramatic dignity.

"Certainly, monsieur. I manage for Monsieur Tryte. I also act

as his secretary. He has been a very wonderful man, monsieur le docteur. I—am devoted to his service.”

Dr. Loviebond nodded. Rather stagey and all that. The French are more adept at blowing trumpets and waving flags than are the English. Dr. Loviebond did neither.

Josephine Bertrand, having made her gesture, conducted Dr. Loviebond to the sick room, and made a tactful and stately exit from the immediate stage.

Dr. Loviebond surprised the great Max sitting up in bed twiddling the fingers of his right hand, and smiling over the exercise like a child. He turned a frail little face to the doctor. They had been acquainted socially, if not in sickness.

“Hullo, Loviebond. Come to have a look at the wreckage?”

Dr. Loviebond’s smile was gentle.

“Moorhead wrote to me.”

“Yes, he said he would. Great man—Moorhead.”

Dr. Loviebond drew a chair to the bedside and sat down. In the sick-room he was the benign quietist, and soothing to people who were genuinely ill. He did not blow in like a stimulating breeze. He was a gentle zephyr.

He said: “I see you can move those fingers. We will take steps to see you do better.”

Tryte was not wearing his glasses, and his strained eyes had a sudden questioning appeal.

“Think you can?”

“Of course we can. I have one of the best masseurs in the whole Riviera. Got to get you at work again.”

Tryte gazed wonderingly at this thin pale man. He had been under the impression that Loviebond was like his name, sweet pulp, but somehow this quiet fellow seemed to understand.

“Good medicine, doctor.”

“Exactly. The delight in doing things, especially the things that matter supremely.”

Tryte stared. Who would have expected so pregnant a phrase to come from that soft pale mouth?

“By gemini, that—is—the—medicine. The delight in doing things. Shall I——?”

Loviebond smiled and put out a hand.

"Grip. As hard as you can. Why—that's quite good. I didn't expect it would be so good."

And suddenly Tryte laughed.

"You—magician. But, honour bright——"

Said Loviebond quietly: "The worst thing a doctor can do is to lie to his patients."

It happened that the sea was shining and it appeared to be a day of gold-faced cherubs instead of shrieking, grey-haired hags. The bedroom had a french window and a balcony, and one of the first things Dr. Loviebond had noticed was that the window was closed. Dr. Loviebond saw much more than he seemed to see. He left his chair, crossed to the window, opened one half of it and let in light and air. He was thinking: "Does that formidable lady object to open windows as well as to locked doors?" and for a second or two he stood looking down at this most live and lovely scene.

"I envy you your garden, Mr. Tryte. Good background for work, I should imagine. Do you paint out of doors?"

The man in the bed reached for and put on his spectacles.

"Sometimes. I'm afraid I have been too much of an interior person."

"Analytical. I'd get out into your garden. After all—this is somewhat the county of Cezanne."

Tryte's eyes opened wide.

"You know your Cezanne, doctor?"

"I've got one or two little things by him: And what a personality! Paint, paint, paint, and damn publicity. I'd keep these windows open."

Loviebond returned slowly to his chair.

"Now—anything to tell me?"

"According to Freud?"

"No, according to nature. Freud's a little out of date. Man isn't all—testicles, if you'll excuse the candour."

And again Maxwell Tryte laughed.

"You are going to be good for me, doctor."

"I hope so. It's my business. Just—a question. Do you find yourself—badly bored—during the process of getting well?"

"Dreadfully—sometimes. Could scream and blub like a frightened kid."

"That will pass. The thing is to get you back to work."

Tryte glanced at his right hand.

"It seems to have lost it's cunning."

"Your job and mine—is to teach it to regain it's cunning."

When Dr. Loviebond had gone, Tryte lay and looked through the open window at the sea and sky. They were not glazed off, but were blue and actual. The quiet man's presence seemed to have left a feeling of peace behind it. Extraordinary fellow! Looked like a bleached curate and yet was as stimulating as a bottle of God's Tonic. The delight of doing things! That was worth all the bottles of medicine that were mixed—ever. And suddenly Maxwell Tryte threw off the bedclothes and pattered to the open window and the balcony. He emerged upon the balcony in his pyjamas.

Dr. Loviebond's very correct figure in grey Homburg, and Savile Row suiting, was disappearing down the garden path, and on the terrace stood Madame with a large white hand to her cheek. Her attitude was that of a woman posed by some exposition that had not pleased her. She turned about, looked up, and saw the Maestro there in sky blue pyjamas.

Shocking recklessness, unpermitted vitality!

"Monsieur, how could you? Go back to bed at once."

Almost Max, Tryte spread his fingers at her.

"Salutation, Josephine. I stand here in the chariot of Phoebus Apollo."

But such a spirit of audacious independence was not to be allowed to a man whose part was that of a sick child in a nursery. Madame ascended the stairs, to find Max still upon the balcony. And then she did a most unwise thing; she picked the Maestro up—he weighed only seven stone or so after his long illness—and carrying him to the bed, dumped him into it and pulled the clothes up over him.

"Quelle sottise!"

Maxwell Tryte had been taken by surprise. He lay there blinking at her, and his feeling about it was a delayed reaction.

"Oh—la—la!"

She strode to the window and closed it.

"Did the doctor permit that?"

"He opened it, Josephine."

"What a doctor! He is not fit to be in charge of—monsieur."

But Max's delayed reaction to her act of brigandage was taking shape. She had man-handled him; she had treated him like a disobedient child; she had exercised her strength and her will-power, and she had humiliated him. She had pushed him back into bed just when the spirit of him was getting out of it. And he was angry.

"Open that window, Josephine."

"Certainly I shall not, monsieur."

"I said—open it."

She folded her arms and refused.

"No, monsieur. And monsieur must have another doctor."

Tryte threw off the clothes and scrambled out of bed, but she caught him by the arm and pushed him back.

"No, monsieur—I will not permit. I care too much for monsieur's health."

What a situation for the Maestro, to find himself at the mercy of this solid Amazon! His poor, feeble little body could not challenge her strength. He was angry, humiliated, and his anger broke into tears.

"Open the window, Josephine——"

She made the profound mistake of assuming that she had coerced him. She became suave and caressing. She arranged the clothes over him; she even patted his face.

"There—there, mon pauvre. Monsieur must lie quiet; monsieur must not exhaust himself."

Her large white hands seemed to make mesmeric passes over him, and how little did she guess that Maxwell Tryte's impulse was to put his teeth into one of those fawning yet tyrannical hands.

"There, monsieur——"

"I want to be left alone."

Almost he had said: "For God's sake, woman, get out."

She gave a final caress to the sheet under his chin.

"Does monsieur wish for a clean handkerchief?"

"No."

The sulky and emotional child should be left to recover himself and absorb the lesson. She made a matronly exit, and when she had gone Maxwell Tryte rolled out of bed, locked the door and reopened the window.

XXII

ROWENA was writing a letter, or rather—she had sat down to write it, only to discover that the composition was not so easy as she had expected.

"Dear Max——"

Was he her dear Max? Oh no, of course not. She hovered over the challenge of an adjective, and biting her pen, slipped into a mood of self-analysis. The question postulated yet another question. If you started analysing your intimate self, did not that suggest that a particular emotion was not yet ripe in you? She was sorry for Maxwell Tryte; he interested her, but——"

Why not the light and playful touch? "Dear Max, I hope this finds you as it leaves me at present? I am in the pink. I have won the Monthly Medal. The weather is just a dirty dish-cloth. I hope you are having sun." She tried something in that strain, was disgusted with its idle facetiousness, and tore it up. She was teetering about on high heels; she had plucked the eyebrows off the face of her immortal soul; she was writing to him like some refined pseudo-blonde with a bald and brainless forehead.

She tried again.

"Damn you—Max,

I am not much good at writing letters. I foozle. Somehow you make me self-conscious, and I feel like a chit.

Uncle Sam says: 'For the love of God—be natural.'

Can one be natural? Can you be natural? You were a master

of pose when we first met. Do you remember how I turned you down? The proud and haughty daughter of a Bart!

No, I am not trying to be funny. Life isn't funny just at present. I'm feeling so much like your picture, the Cassandra child. Cross-roads and all that. I think I want a guardian and friend.

Now—I am talking all about myself, but I don't feel quite myself. Funny feeling, isn't it, as though you had suddenly got out of short frocks, and couldn't manage a long one.

I don't call things lousy any more.

How are you, my lad? I really do want to know. How is the hand? You have got to get that hand right, because I may want you to paint a new sort of portrait of me. Not just egotism. Somehow I have a feeling that you can reveal people to themselves, just how—I don't know.

Can you write yet? Send me any sort of scrawl, and you can make it all about yourself. Some people are interesting—even when talking about themselves.

I have to take the dogs out.

Good-bye, and good luck.

ROWENA."

She re-read the letter twice, and missed the essential finger that was pointed against herself. It said: "You will not know yourself until you lose yourself in some big thing and so find it. Now—you are afraid to be yourself. Some day you will have to face it."

Maxwell Tryte's mail was considerable. Josephine Bertrand took charge of the letters, and scrutinized them carefully before passing them to her master. She paid special attention to postmarks. A letter whose address was typed did not rouse suspicion; an envelope addressed by hand came in a very different category. When, for the first time, the Medworth postmark showed itself on an envelope that was addressed by hand and in a feminine hand, Josephine Bertrand did not hesitate. She opened that letter and read it, and so it came about that Rowena's candour was wasted upon an unscrupulous and formidable censor who put letter and envelope in the fire. No young English Miss

should be allowed to trail a persuasive petticoat before the Master.

There were other letters from Medworth, and they came from Captain Samson. Madame did not censor these. She read them, or one or two of them, for Max was careless about some letters, and it had not yet occurred to him that he could be the victim of such treachery. Madame, after consultation with that living corpse—her sister—had decided that a short period of honeyed acquiescence was advisable.

Madame Daudet had said in her creaking voice: "If he is to be *bon enfant*—don't put too many pins in the binder. I take it that *monsieur* has a—temperament."

Josephine, carrying up Tryte's letters on a tray, would linger and appear to be busy about the room while he sorted out his mail. Was he waiting for some particular letter? He was. That was the impression that she gathered. And he was disappointed—because a letter from a particular person did not appear.

The weather was sunny, and Tryte got out into the garden. He breakfasted in bed, read for a while, dressed, and then was shepherded downstairs by a sedulous Josephine, and her persistence worried him.

"I can manage, Josephine."

"No, not yet, *monsieur*. *Monsieur* might fall."

A long chair and cushion were ready for him in a sunny and sheltered corner of the loggia, with a table at his side. Madame spread a rug.

"I want a writing pad, and my pen and a pencil, Josephine."

Madame was obstructive.

"*Monsieur* must not over-tire his hand yet."

And Tryte flared.

"Damn it, I want to exercise my fingers."

The "Damn it" decided her. If a child was peevish, some allowance should be made, and she brought him what he asked for. But she watched him from a window. He was scribbling tentatively on the pad, and she understood that his passion was to re-educate that hand. Would he succeed? Success might mean—

She would have to watch him carefully and supervise the product.

The effort of writing tired him. He could manage an infantile scrawl, and equally crude drawings. How slow and painful would the progress be? Would the new Maxwell Tryte ever recover the old self?

To him, when he was lying with closed eyes and warmed by the sun, came Roberto with a posy of sweet-smelling stock. He looked at his master, and hesitated. Should a sick and sleeping gentleman be disturbed?

Tryte opened his eyes and saw him.

"Hallo, Roberto."

Roberto showed all his very white teeth, and presented the bouquet.

"Pretty flowers, monsieur."

Tryte took them, and held the posy to his nose.

"You are a good gardener, Roberto, and a good fellow."

Roberto beamed.

"Soon—monsieur—will be able to go round the garden. If one had a chair on wheels——"

"Good idea."

"Monsieur could see the green grass, and sit among the olives, and I would make rain."

"Roberto, you are a genius."

At the end of a week Madame acted. She had examined the products of that semi-paralysed hand, and realized that progress was only too evident. Dr. Loviebond came daily, and he was good for Monsieur, too good. Madame put on her best black, and called upon the French doctor whom she had selected. She talked to him with almost tragic gravity. She desired him to take over the case of poor Mr. Maxwell Tryte.

Her experiment proved unfortunate. She had been impressively frank with the French physician, but not completely so, and when it so happened that Drs. Loviebond and Renoir met by coincidence at the Villa Violet gate, the fat was in the fire. They were old enemies, for Dr. Renoir resented the activities of an Englishman in his St. Martin, and Dr. Loviebond

had suffered from sundry unprofessional tricks at Dr. Renoir's hands.

But Loviebond was polite. He could afford to be polite.

"Morning, Renoir. A patient of yours here?"

"I came to see Monsieur Tryte."

"Oh, indced! How is that?"

"I have been called."

"By Mr. Tryte?"

"No, his secretary."

Loviebond smiled, and continued to be courteous.

"That is—curious, for Mr. Tryte is my patient. Moreover, he has no secretary at the moment."

"Pardon, Madame Bertrand——"

"You mean—his housekeeper. Well, come in, Renoir. I am seeing Mr. Tryte and I will ask him if he would like to see you. A very interesting case. I am glad to say he is doing well."

Dr. Renoir was looking black. He was very black in colour.

"I understand, monsieur, that Mr. Tryte—was—not progressing."

"Under my treatment—what! Did Madame Bertrand tell you that?"

Obviously, to judge by the Frenchman's angry embarrassment she had done so. Dr. Loviebond, still smiling, opened the gate.

"Come in, Renoir, come in."

But the Frenchman shrugged, pulled a sulky face, and did not accept the challenge. He had had other differences with this quiet man, and been worsted. That damned bitch had made a fool of him.

Dr. Loviebond, still smiling, climbed the path to pass Roberto pulling up weeds.

"Well, Roberto, keeping sin from the garden?"

Dr. Loviebond spoke in Italian. He was a capable linguist. Roberto grinned.

"God made them, sir."

"Tell me, Roberto, they say that weeds are of the female sex. Do you understand me?"

Roberto's grin went right across his face.

"It must have been the woman who brought—all trouble into Eden."

But though Dr. Loviebond had kept a smiling face his inner man was not smiling. There was something here to be examined and diagnosed, and the interference might be less clumsy than it seemed. Had Madame La France counted upon his going off upon his dignity and in a huff when he discovered that another doctor had been called in without warning or consultation? Possibly. And if so—what lay at the back of the manoeuvre? A conspiracy to control and coerce the future of poor Maxwell Tryte?

Dr. Loviebond found the villa door locked and the french windows closed, and this too was not without significance. He rang the bell, and the door was opened by Mademoiselle Daudet; her Christian name was Desiree, and no young woman could have looked less so. She had her mother's lipless mouth, a face the colour of a Swiss cheese, and she wore spectacles.

But Dr. Loviebond smiled at her as he passed in.

"Good morning, m'amselle. Mr. Tryte up yet?"

"I do not know, monsieur."

It was her business to know nothing.

Halfway up the stairs Dr. Loviebond was confronted by Madame. He smiled upon her most genially, and for the moment he wondered whether it was her purpose to bar his way. If so—— But Josephine Bertrand stood aside. Dr. Loviebond's smile was more potent than any thrusting hand.

"Good morning, madame. A lovely day."

So suave and smiling was he that Josephine concluded that he had not yet discovered her summoning of a substitute. The battle would come later.

"A beautiful day, monsieur."

"Mr. Tryte up?"

"Not yet, monsieur. I fear he is not so well," and her manner of saying it suggested that Dr. Loviebond was to blame.

"Is that so?"

She made as though to accompany him into the patient's room, but Dr. Loviebond was prepared for such aggression. Still smiling he stood with his fingers on the handle.

"You need not wait, madame."

He looked her in the eyes, and then it was that she began to realize that this quiet man had her measure.

Maxwell Tryte was in bed, with his hands lying palm upwards on the quilt. They had a flaccid look, and his face was like his hands. Loviebond had closed the door. He smiled at Tryte, and then with soft suddenness reopened the door. The lady was still upon the landing. Dr. Loviebond gave her a steady, smiling, ironic stare. He waited. His attitude said as plainly as words could have said it: "Thank you, madame; no need to listen at doors."

Slowly she descended, pulling at her lower lip with a big white finger.

Dr. Loviebond reclosed the door.

"Well, old man, not feeling too good?"

Tryte rolled his head on the pillow.

"Feel rotten."

"Oh, just how?"

"Weak and funny. No pep."

"Sleep well?"

"Too well. Woke up so fuddled and heavy."

"Is that so? Take anything?"

"Just a glass of hot milk."

"I see. Well, let's have a look at you."

Dr. Loviebond was puzzled, but that did not mean that he was posed. On the contrary, Tryte's condition made the doctor ask himself a question. A glass of hot milk, and what else? Was that damned woman playing tricks with his patient? But to Tryte he said nothing of his suspicions or of the intrusion of Dr. Renoir. He told Tryte that he must expect these fluctuations, and that the return of health was a series of curves, with peaks and hollows.

"I'd get up and get out, Max."

"I get so tired."

"Yes. Why don't you have a valet?"

"I never have cottoned to the idea of a tame——"

"Well, here's another idea. Why not Roberto? He's a kind and capable chap."

Tryte's face brightened.

"Yes, I might. As a matter of fact Roberto suggested I might have a wheeled chair, and be trundled out."

"Better still, my dear chap, get out on your own feet with Roberto to help. I'll have a talk to him. And, by the way, I should cut out the hot milk at night. May lie heavy upon your stomach."

He left his patient cheered, and ready for the adventure, and down below he met Madame. He was curt, smiling, debonair. He said nothing about the glass of milk.

"Monsieur is just a little depressed. I have ordered him out into the garden. I am arranging for Roberto to come in and help him."

Madame looked black.

"That is—quite—unnecessary, monsieur. I do not have a gardener in my——"

She paused, caught herself up, but not in time.

"My house—my lady," said Loviebond to himself. "You great big Percheron mare."

To Madame he said: "I will send Roberto in. My orders—are orders—Madame. Good morning."

And he went off to find the Italian.

XXIII

ROWENA was peeved.

Her letter had gone to the South, and no reply had come to it, which could be explained by the possibility that Max could not yet handle a pen.

But why should she be peeved? What—after all—was Maxwell Tryte to her?

She went to the Hunt Ball that night in a vainglorious mood.

She was wearing a new frock, jade green, a Paris production. She looked a lovely and felt it, and was ready to prove it upon all mankind. The Hunt Ball was held at Medworth's old Assembly Rooms, which still retained the decor and faded atmosphere of Regent George. It was said that both the Kingly Buck and Beau Brummel had honoured Medworth with their presences, and that—as usual—the Beau had out-dressed the King.

Rowena sailed in and was soon surrounded by a sea of pink. If she had come to celebrate her ascendancy, it was here and not for the asking. She danced with the Master, and she danced three times with the youngest member, Sir Percy Clutterbuck. He was an exceedingly bright and devastating lad, very sure of himself and his affairs and of his dancing, but at the end of the third fox trot he was boring her. Now—why?

She had kept the supper-dance open, and not long before this interlude she caught sight of a most unexpected person, Captain Valentine Samson. Gosh, what was he doing here? But she shed the Clutterbuck, and went sailing over towards the place where Samson was posed in the part of male and naval wallflower.

"Hullo, Uncle. What are you doing here?"

"Being—social."

"Didn't know you—'unted."

"I don't."

"Take me into supper, there's a dear."

"You saucy wench! And what will all the youngsters say?"

"I'm bored, Uncle, with buckishness. And you will let me eat."

"Thank you, my dear, for the compliment, if I can take it as such."

"You can. I've been feeling all dressed up, and with no one to talk to."

She took his arm, and they passed into the supper-room, but not unchallenged. The Clutterbuck, who was a very vain and self-assured young man, and who could not understand any sane girl shedding him for an ancient sailor in an equally ancient dress suit, waylaid the pair.

"I say, sir, this is sheer piracy."

Samson gave him a genial smile.

"No, a cutting-out expedition, my lad."

And Rowena added: "Go away, Percy, and shed the light of your countenance elsewhere."

It was not a very good supper, and some of it was as ancient as the Medworth atmosphere, but that also applied to the champagne, which made it drinkable. Rowena and Uncle Sam drank champagne, he—with an air of mild austerity, Rowena as though she needed it.

"Apples all sold, Uncle?"

"Every Jack one of them. Made quite a nice profit."

"Good for you. I think I must take up some sort of job."

"Such as——?"

"I don't know yet."

"There were days——"

"When a woman's duty was in the home, what?"

"You have said it."

"Well, shut up, Uncle. Don't be preachy."

"God forbid."

There was a pause while a waiter refilled her glass. She twiddled the stem, watched the bubbles, drank, put the glass down again with graceful deliberation.

"Heard from Max—at all?"

"Yes. Had a letter yesterday."

She frowned.

"So—he can scribble. I'm glad."

Samson looked at her hands.

"Yes. By the way—he said—he had not heard from you."

Rowena's head went up.

"What! Why—I wrote——"

"He said he had written to you."

"I haven't had a letter."

Their eyes met in a mutual question.

"When did you write, my dear?"

"Oh, quite a fortnight ago."

"His letter to me came yesterday. It is the second I have had. Some miscarriage—somewhere."

Rowena was playing with her champagne glass, and gazing into it as though it were a crystal.

"I wonder—— Tell me, Uncle, what was your reaction to the Bertrand woman?"

Samson's face seemed to sharpen.

"A very capable person."

"Perhaps—a little too capable. Do you remember that other picture?"

"Very much so. Conventional France gone hag. By Jove, what if she is——"

Their eyes met, and Rowena's eyes were fierce.

"I would not put it past her, Uncle. One gets a certain feeling about some people."

Samson sat silent.

"Well, why not write again."

"To have my letter—put in the fire, and perhaps read by that——"

Samson smiled a sly little smile at her.

"He gets my letters. Supposing I enclose yours in one of mine? That would be a test case."

"You are a bright fellow, Uncle."

"Why not try it? And say nothing about the previous letter. Softly walkee catchee monkey."

"Gosh, yes, I will."

Josephine Bertrand was feeling justified in rubbing her solid white hands together. There had been no further letters from the English Miss, nor had the Maestro put into the post-box any letter addressed to Tanwood. Such fancies could be smothered without much heart-searching. Certainly, she had had to allow Roberto into the house, for it would not do to antagonize and rouse the suspicion of Dr. Loviebond, and the Maestro had been helped by the Italian out into the garden, but this exercise had appeared to tire Mr. Tryte unduly.

"I feel so weak, Roberto."

Roberto was kind and comforting. In fact, on more than one occasion he picked his master up and carried him to any spot which Tryte might fancy.

"I'd like grass to-day, Roberto, and the olives."

"And I make rain."

"Yes, make rain, Roberto."

Or, Tryte would ask for the little terrace where the stocks and wallflowers grew, and scented the air, or to be set below the little grove of mimosas which made him think of buttered eggs on branches.

"Is that too far for you, Roberto?"

"Monsieur is no heavier than a bambino."

But Roberto was puzzled. He had a gardener's eye, and was no fool amid the manifestations of nature, and it seemed to Roberto that his master was weaker and more childish in his ways than when he had first come to the villa. It should not be so. Sunlight, good food, air from the sea. Poor Mr. Tryte would lie there in his chair, flaccid and melancholy, and almost as though he was perpetually sleepy. Roberto had heard of sleepy sickness, an affliction of the brain—but his master had not been so somnolent and vacant in mind when first he had come from England.

It was Madame Daudet who did the shopping, Madame Daudet of the grim face. She passed out daily with a basket, in austere black, for purchasing anything for as little as she could give was an enthralling game to her. Besides—— Yes, it showed a nice credit balance on the fabricated weekly bills. Mr. Tryte was sick and did not trouble about money. Madame Daudet's pilgrimages to market and shop included regular visits to an obscure and rather macabre little pharmacie in the old town. There appeared to be a friendly understanding between Madame Daudet, and the little French Jew behind the counter.

He would grin at her and lisp.

"So, your sister is sleeping better, madame?"

"Much better."

"That is good."

Roberto did not like Madame Daudet. In fact, he disliked her with passion. Such a peregrinating corpse was a contradiction of all that lovely woman should be. Roberto's wife also went shopping, and as it happened she was not known by sight to Madame Daudet. And one day Roberto's wife said to Roberto: "That Daudet woman is always in the pharmacie by the church. She must live on medicine. Constipation—I should think."

And Roberto chuckled.

Maxwell Tryte appeared to be subsiding into a state of dreaming apathy. It puzzled him and yet—strangely enough—it did not disturb him. Perhaps this feeling of sweet somnolence was part of the process of getting well? He had given up attempting to scribble or to sketch. All that would come later. In fact he was reverting to an infantile state, content to eat and sleep and dream, and yet he was still imbued with the primitive desires of man. He had vivid dreams at night, and often they were amorous. Things physical were smothering things mental.

Josephine was so kind, so douce, so all pervading. In his strangely drowsy state she was like a perfumed cloud enveloping him. He seemed to float upon her perpetual presence, and to be upborn by her hands. His infantile mood grew more emotional. He was content to lie in bed, to be fed, to be caressed. Roberto's ministrations ceased, for Maxwell Tryte wished for other hands. It was always Josephine, Josephine. She loomed over and around him, warm, scented, deep of bosom, dark of eye. More and more prevalent was her presence; more and more did he desire her nearness and her solace.

The primitive in him appeared to be suffused with the vague urges of a child, part infantile, part pubertian. He liked to be touched by Josephine; he liked the smell of her, the warmth, the flavour of woman.

"Lift me up, Josephine. My pillows have slipped."

Then came the moment when he clung to her, and drew her down with little sensuous snugglings. She surrendered but not everything. Her conquest—in surrender—should be gradual. She suffered him to bury his face in her bosom. The infant man that was Maxwell Tryte was almost at her mercy.

Dr. Loviebond was bothered. What was the explanation of the strange and somnolent state into which his patient had fallen? He did not like the look of things; there was something mysterious and sinister about the business.

Dr. Loviebond kept his own counsel, but he rang up an eminent French physician who specialized in psychiatry and prac-

tised in Cannes. Would Dr. Reynaud come over and see a case of his in consultation? He would explain the case when they met. It was obscure and baffling.

Dr. Reynaud came, calling first at Loviebond's flat, and there they conferred upon the problem. Dr. Reynaud had the appearance of a benign black eagle. He sat perched and listening, and asking an occasional pertinent question. Had there been any doubt about the original diagnosis? None at all. A series of lumbar punctures had settled the diagnosis, and Moorhead was not the man to muddle a case. Had there been a recent puncture? No, there had not. Dr. Loviebond had thought it unnecessary. And the patient's condition had deteriorated? It had. Listlessness, somnolence, loss of interest, an almost childish mentality.

Then they went on to the Villa Violet. Madame was unprepared for this new invasion. Taken by surprise she was mild as milk.

The two doctors found Maxwell Tryte dozing in bed. He smiled at them, a babyish smile. There was no reaction of surprise or interest.

"This is Dr. Reynaud, Maxwell. He has come to have a look at you."

Tryte put out a flaccid hand.

"Very kind of you, I'm sure."

Dr. Reynaud observed and examined him, while Dr. Loviebond looked on. The technicalities were familiar to him, and need not be recorded, but when Dr. Reynaud had completed his examination he made a sign to Loviebond to go out with him on to the landing, and there they surprised Madame gliding hurriedly down the stairs.

Both doctors saw her and exchanged glances.

"Yes, Tryte's housekeeper."

Dr. Reynaud nodded.

"Peculiar condition. I wonder if there is a recurrence of some cranial pressure. I would like to try another puncture. I have a syringe with me."

"I think it is a sound idea."

So, the deed was done, and the extracted fluid held up to the light. It was quite clear and unclouded.

"H'm, no turbidity. I'll take this home and examine it. I will phone you to-morrow."

"Thanks very much. Will you see him again?"

"I should like to."

Dr. Loviebond was rung up the following evening. It was Reynaud speaking. The bacterial examination had proved negative.

"Something of a problem, my friend. I will sleep on it."

Loviebond was worried. He had a conscience, a craftsman's conscience, and it was not mere loss of prestige that troubled him. All St. Martin and half the Riviera might know that he was attending the great Max, and that Mr. Maxwell Tryte was making no progress, and be damned to them. Had poor Tryte suffered fatal damage to his nerve tissue? Dr. Loviebond went out and walked on the problem, and his long neat legs carried him to the Villa Violet, and in the gateway he came upon Roberto weeding the drive.

Loviebond paused.

"More sinfulness, Roberto. How those things grow!"

They were engaged in desultory conversation when Madame Daudet came forth upon one of her shopping adventures, and passed out with the stiff face of a corpse.

"Who is that, Roberto?"

The Italian was not smiling. He extended the first and little finger of his right hand.

"Madame's sister. She has the evil eye. She cooks and shops for Monsieur."

"Cooks?"

"Yes, monsieur. It is a joke between me and my wife that she goes to a pharmacie twice a week—to buy medicine—for constipation."

Dr. Loviebond gave a little jerk of the head.

"What's that, Roberto? She——"

"Yes, monsieur, always visiting that pharmacie near the old church. My wife has seen her. As I say—it is a joke between us."

Dr. Loviebond's eyes were set seawards in a revealing stare. A shabby, chemist's shop, a sinister little man behind the counter,

drugs, dope. Ye Gods, was that it? Maxwell Tryte's condition was completely that of a man who was being drugged. If so—how damnable!

To Roberto he said: "That woman is Madame Bertrand's sister."

"Yes, monsieur. And the girl is her daughter."

Three women against Maxwell Tryte, a domestic conspiracy to drug the poor devil into helplessness! Dr. Loviebond's decision brooked no delay. He would not wait for Reynaud's next visit. He would go at once to see Reynaud.

XXIV

REYNAUD snapped finger and thumb together, his hand in the air.

"Psst, exactly! That would explain everything. And do you remember, my friend, the woman on the landing?"

Loviebond nodded.

"I do—and very much so. But the proof?"

Reynaud was smiling.

"A nurse. But better still—a nursing-home. Sudden and unexpected removal. In a few days we should prove——"

Loviebond's bothered eyes began to laugh.

"Splendid! The very thing. Why the devil didn't I think of it before? We have an excellent home at St. Martin."

"Well, my friend, act at once. Give those women no warning. Then, if the condition alters we shall know who and what have been responsible."

Loviebond was on his feet.

"Supposing—the two of us——? More impressive. Would you come back with me?"

"I will, my friend. This case intrigues me. Can you procure an ambulance?"

"Yes. we have one. But first—the nursing home. I think they have a room vacant. The matron is just the woman for such a case."

"Good. Let us go. We can use my car."

Critical situation, psychological occasion, ripeness of the emotional moment!

Josephine had taken her decision, and maybe the intrusion of Dr. Reynaud had decided her. A formidable, sharp-eyed gentleman—this doctor from Nice! It was the moment to consummate the tender act, to set a seal upon the intimate relationship which should make of Madame a Madame in earnest. The poor Maestro was in a clinging and pathetic mood, so Josephine, with a Parisian attention to detail, went forth and had her black hair dressed, and very magnificent hair it was. Also, she purchased a new yellow silk nightdress, and a bottle of particular perfume.

She had taken the key from Monsieur Max's door. No more doors should be locked against her. She would surrender her chastity to the Maestro, debauch him with dear caresses, and claim to possess him in being possessed. Monsieur Max, poor gentleman, would wake up mated, and she would be determined to demand from him countenance and recognition. She could say: "Mon cheri, I became your mistress because I love you, but I am a respectable and a religious woman. The good God and my conscience will demand our marriage. But that is easy. As Madame Maxwell Tryte I can care for the Maestro as he should be cared for."

Moreover she would have her witness. It was arranged that Madame Daudet should open Monsieur Max's door, switch on the light, discover the tender situation, gasp, turn off the light, and retire in sedate embarrassment.

It was not to be. How was Josephine to divine the coming of two interfering and tyrannical men, with an ambulance, a nurse, and a male attendant. The rescue party arrived at the Villa Violet when Madame Bertrand, who had fallen into some English ways, was taking "Five o'clock," and very decorative

patisserie. The front door was unlocked, and the invaders were in the house before she heard their voices.

Mon Dieu—what was this?

She sailed forth and saw—the outrage, a veritable crowd upon the stairs, her—stairs, and ascending them without a by-your-leave. Her high bosom rose and her anger. She shouted.

“What is this, brigandage? Ma foi, I will call the police.”

No one took any notice of her. Drs. Reynaud and Loviebond entered Tryte’s room, leaving the nurse and the ambulance driver on guard, with instructions to halt any interference. It came. Madame hurried up the stairs. What was this—outrage, this invasion? The nurse, a very large and capable young person, held up a hand and remonstrated.

“Taisez vous, madame, taisez vous.”

Madame glared, but the nurse and the attendant barred her way, and made it plain to her that they had no intention of moving.

“I demand to see Monsieur Tryte.”

“The doctors are with him. They must not be disturbed.”

Madame bit at her lower lip, but she was sufficiently shrewd not to make a scene outside Monsieur’s door. What was happening in there? Why this show of force? She hurried down the stairs, went to the door and saw the ambulance car. Mon Dieu, they were taking Monsieur away! She hastened to take counsel with her sister.

Maxwell Tryte was asleep when the doctors entered the room. Loviebond had to wake him, and that somnolence was significant. Tryte smiled at them both like a sweet-tempered and complaisant infant.

“Well, old man, we are going to put you in a nursing-home for a week. Dr. Reynaud wants to make a further examination.”

Tryte just smiled at them. He was wax. Josephine Bertrand—in preparing him for the final surrender, had helped the doctors in their strategy. The nurse was called in. Tryte was put into his dressing-gown and wrapped in a blanket, while the ambulance man went for a carrying-chair. Loviebond, with practical sense,

found a suitcase in a cupboard, and stowed into it sundry necessities. In passing a table by the window he noticed three unopened letters lying there, and he slipped them into the case.

Tryte, still smiling a drowsy smile, like a nice child who was pleased with everything that happened to him, was placed in the chair and carried down the stairs by the nurse and the ambulance man. The doctors followed, Loviebond carrying the suitcase. They were at the door when Madame burst upon them.

"What is this? What are you doing with Monsieur Tryte? I demand to know."

Dr. Loviebond answered her with quiet curtness.

"Mr. Tryte is being taken to a nursing home. That is all, madame."

And he closed the door on her.

The Maison Bella Vista was truly and admirably named. A pleasant white house with green jalousies and balconies, it stood on a little bluff in full sunlight and not two hundred yards from the sea. Parked in a pleasant garden, it was in the world and yet not of it, serenely placed above dust and discords, a happy house even though it knew much suffering. For, strange though it may seem to the strong and turgid souls, suffering may bring a happiness of its own, and the serenity of physical surrender. The Home's staff was Anglo-French, its proprietress English, a Miss Starkie, who was also its matron. Dr. Loviebond could say with a humorous twinkle that life had played a joke on the matron in naming her Starkie. She was round and jocund and blue of eye, a woman who could soft-pedal or loud-pedal as the occasion demanded. Miss Starkie might be God's own almoner, but there were no flies on her.

Maxwell Tryte, put to bed, promptly went to sleep. He woke about sunset in a pleasant cream-coloured room, with the sea cobalt blue beyond his window. He could see the flush of the sky above the pines on the western headland. His bed was comfortable; his head did not ache. In fact it seemed to possess a quiet clarity, the tranquility of that windless sea.

The door opened, and the big blonde nurse looked in.

"Feeling comfortable, Mr. Tryte?"

"Very," said he.

"Dinner is at seven. Will that suit you?"

"I don't feel very hungry, nurse."

"Doctor's orders. You must feed up."

A sparkle of the old Max flashed at her.

"But not be fed up."

"Exactly."

She was closing the door when she remembered something.

"Oh, there were some letters for you. Dr. Loviebond brought them along. Would you like them?"

"Please."

She left him with the letters. One was from his publisher, another from a press agency, the third bore the Melford postmark and the script of Valentine Samson. It appeared to be a fat letter, and discarding the others Tryte opened it, to find that its bulk was explained by an enclosure. The writing on the envelope was strange to him, its address the one word—"Max."

Rowena! Could it be? His right hand fumbled. But if it was Rowena why had she sent the letter through Uncle Sam? His shaky fingers plucked two sheets from the envelope. He glanced first at the signature at the bottom of the last page. It was Rowena, and she signed herself just Rowena.

"Dear Max,

I am sending this through Uncle Val because my other letters—two of them, my lad—seem to have gone astray somewhere. This will make me three up on you, for I have had nothing from your side. I pass that over because of your poor hand——"

Max Tryte paused here. His face sharpened. He sat up suddenly in bed as though some thought had galvanized him. She had written to him twice before, and he had written to her. What had become of those letters? Had someone intercepted them? Who?

Who could it have been but Josephine? It was to Josephine that he had passed letters for the post. It had been Josephine who had brought him his letters. Great God Almighty! And this last

letter had reached him because it had come camouflaged under a male fist. Tryte sank back on the pillows. With the letter in his hand he lay and stared at the sea.

Josephine! By all the prophets! Had she indeed done this treacherous thing? And if so—why? Suddenly his brain seemed clear, and was illumined by the realization of the whole unpleasant picture. Well, he was damned! Had La Belle France developed designs upon him, proposed to souse him in buttered sauce and sensuality, and keep him a sick fool utterly and childishly at her mercy?

For the first time since his illness Maxwell Tryte was angry, and angry against himself. Picture of the world's most cheeky play-boy fooled by a stale old trick! And anger was good for him. It got him out of bed and paddling about the room in his slippers while he read the rest of that marvellous letter. Rowena, Rowena! By all the Gods he could recover anger, and high emotion, and the craftsman's urge—if——

He had gone on to the reading of Valentine Samson's letter, and had come to that significant sentence: "If the enclosed reaches you, my lad, you will know that someone has been playing tricks with your post-bag," when the door was opened by Dr. Loviebond. He stood there, staring, and then he chuckled.

"What, what, what, Tryte! Getting out of bed against orders."

Maxwell Tryte waved a hand at him.

"Hallo, doc. I've had a letter."

"Seems to have stimulated you."

"It has."

"Well, get back into bed."

"Wait a moment. I feel quite bright in the head, and on my toes. Look here, between man and man, why did you shove me in here?"

"I wonder if I ought to tell you."

"There seem to have been some nasty goings-on. I have had letters—stopped. Tell me, doc, in confidence."

Loviebond sat down.

"We brought you in here, Tryte, because we thought you were being—drugged."

"Drugged! Great Scott!"

"Yes. A day or two away from the Villa Violet will prove it or disprove it."

XXV

STRANGE that so large and comely a creature should be so thin of heart, but that was one of life's anomalies. Josephine Bertrand looked like Pagan Love, Madame Daudet like a corpse, but—actually—Madame Daudet possessed more feeling than her sister, and had suffered from qualms in the matter of the attempt upon the poor Maestro's freedom and virtue.

The one form of emotion of which Madame Bertrand was capable was that of cold and merciless anger. She did not weep, or beat her bosom or tear her hair, or cry out for her poor man-child. She raged, but with an implacable and solid composure. She was a menacing iceberg, not a torch.

She said to her sister: "These brigands of doctors may take him away, but I have him, I have him."

Her sister shrugged.

"But how——?"

"He has slept with me. He cannot deny it. It will be marriage—or—compensation."

Madame Daudet was not so grim as she looked, and her sister's cynical candour shocked her.

"But—Josephine——"

"You do not believe me? I say to you that I insist upon your believing me. You will be a witness."

"And perjure myself?"

"I tell you it is true. Did you not consent to——?"

Madame Daudet was showing caution.

"Yes, but I had thought better of it. The poor gentleman was not himself, as you know."

"I—know nothing, and you—will know nothing of all that."

"But the pharmacien might—talk."

"Oh, la-la, what of that? The stuff was for me. I was worried about monsieur, and could not sleep."

Madame Daudet gave her sister a beady look.

"I do not wish to be involved in a—conspiracy. The law—might——"

"Mon Dieu," said Josephine, "you always were a frightened hen."

St. Martin possessed two nursing-homes, and Madame put on her Sunday black and went forth to find her victim. Her first choice proved the right one, but Bella Vista was not Bella Vista to her. A maid, confronted with the Bertrand arrogance, showed the lady into a waiting-room and went for Miss Starkie.

"There is a Madame Bertrand demanding to see Monsieur Tryte."

"Oh, is there," said Miss Starkie. "I think she will see—me."

Miss Starkie was wise as to the situation. Moreover, in dealing with visitors she could maintain such an air of almost stupid serenity that no rudeness appeared to make any impression upon her. She was like a smiling rubber doll that did not so much as squawk when you squeezed or smote it. Loss of temper wasted time and the sweet juices of sanity. She came in beaming upon Josephine Bertrand, knowing now that according to the doctors—Madame was very much in the potage.

"Good morning, madame. What can I do for you?"

"I wish to see my fiancé."

"Indeed. And who is that?"

"Monsieur Tryte."

So, that was the game! Miss Starkie continued smiling.

"Quite impossible, I'm afraid."

"I demand to see him."

"Quite impossible. Against the doctor's orders. If you will excuse me—I am very busy——"

"I refuse to leave until——"

Miss Starkie became blue-eyed.

"My dear madame, wouldn't that be rather foolish. This is my house, yet one would not wish to call in the police."

Miss Starkie watched for the symptoms of an emotional

storm, but it did not come. Madame's bosom heaved, and her black eyes thundered, but she controlled herself, for she did not wish to be introduced to the gendarmerie.

She rose.

"I will write to my fiancé. He will wish to know how I have been treated."

Miss Starkie opened the door.

"Good day, madame. Beautiful weather, is it not?"

But when Dr. Loviebond called Miss Starkie described the interview and its implications. Obviously the lady intended to pose as Maxwell Tryte's intimate, and to blackmail him. Dr. Loviebond looked sly.

"Let her. I think I can deal with her. I have been to the police, and together we have extracted some information from the pharmacy gentleman. And the stuff he supplied to Madame's sister—would explain Tryte's symptoms to perfection."

"I think she might be an awkward customer, doctor."

"Quite so, but one could make the situation somewhat awkward for her."

"She threatens to write to Mr. Tryte."

"Well, impound all letters with a French stamp, or those left by hand. You can pass them to me."

Maxwell Tryte woke to see a huge, cherry coloured sun emerging from a blue-black sea. How splendid, how mysterious! His head felt clear, clear as crystal. He sat up. The stupor had passed. He seemed to be able to see things more clearly.

Someone knocked.

"Come in."

The big nurse appeared.

"Your early morning tea, Mr. Tryte."

"Splendid!"

He was not conscious at the moment of a particular movement, but the nurse observed it. He put out his right hand to help her with the tray. She let him take it, but was ready to rescue the tray if his hand failed. It did not.

"Why—that's lovely, Mr. Tryte."

"What, nurse? The sun?"

"No. Don't you see?"

He smiled at her.

"I see a very pleasant person."

"Thank you, Mr. Tryte. But you used your right hand to take the tray."

"By the prophets, so—I—did!"

They did not tell him of Josephine Bertrand's visit and her attempt to pose as his betrothed. Max might have laughed, or he might have been scared, for he had vague and dreamy recollections of contacts and caresses, and when the expected letter arrived Miss Starkie handed it to Dr. Loviebond, who locked it in his desk. Two could play at the game of intercepting letters. As for Max, he was in a very scribbling mood. They let him have notepaper, and he wrote two letters.

"Dear Rowena——" and there he stuck for quite a long while, just as she had suffered inhibition in her first letter to him. Nor had he got much further when Loviebond arrived, and was at once aware of the change in his patient.

"Well, my lad, how's the hand?"

For answer Tryte twiddled his fingers.

"That's the stuff. Do you feel up to a little confidential talk?"

"I do."

"May do you good to know—that when you appeared to be going down hill, there was a reason for it—that was not in yourself."

"You mean—I was——?"

"Exactly. We have traced the source, and the identity of the dope and its purchaser. Your housekeeper's sister."

Tryte gaped and looked pathetic.

"My god, so——?"

"Directly we moved you here—the symptoms ceased, as we thought they would."

"Why the devil did—Josephine——? Doc, this hurts me rather—I've been——"

Loviebond nodded at him.

"Yes, I know. Someone you trusted."

"She must have stolen my letters—too. But—why——?"

Loviebond could have laughed. Here was the world's wit and playboy behaving like the most innocent of simpletons.

"Doesn't it occur to you—that the lady had designs——"

"On me?"

"Exactly. A pretty damnable method—though. My diagnosis is that the lady planned to keep you a sick man, tie you up, and then marry you."

The effect upon Tryte was remarkable. For a moment or two he sat gaping, owl-eyed, and then he began to laugh, and he laughed until his eyes were wet.

That was a wholesome reaction, but poor Tryte's problems, as his doctor saw them, were formidable and far from solution. What could be the future of a man with a temperament such as Maxwell Tryte's, a man who had been fawned upon and flattered, and whose genius had expressed itself with almost fatal facility? There might be no facility now, and Loviebond, who was more cultured and comprehending than most members of his profession, questioned the survival of the artistic urge, the thing called inspiration. It might be tragic for Tryte if it had deserted him, and still more tragic perhaps if it persisted like a flame in a cracked lamp. What could be more pathetic than an artist's struggle to express that which was in him, with the flesh failing him and thwarting him perpetually. The problem was that of Tryte's hand and eyes, and more than that, the spirit that was in him.

The more Loviebond pondered his patient's case and its immediate difficulties, the more was he moved to confess that Josephine Bertrand's solution of it might have been justified, had other methods and motives been hers. Here was a man who never might recover his full powers, and who might find more happiness in childish surrender than in the anguish of striving to accomplish that which was no longer possible. Josephine Bertrand had seen her opportunity, but she had taken it cruelly. Tryte the artist would have died at her hands, Tryte the man lived on in comfortable decadence and sterility.

Dr. Loviebond—as a physician—had to make his choice for his patient. What was it to be? Surrender, a mild and semi-senile

hedonism, or effort, inspiration? It did not take him long to make his choice. This Bertrand woman had to be eliminated, and prevented from persecuting Maxwell Tryte with sex-claims. Next, Tryte must be rescued from the atmosphere of sickness. Give the craftsman back his tools and the delight in doing things, and the spirit will revivify the flesh.

A quiet suite in an hotel, that appeared to be the solution. The Villa Violet with the Bertrand clan in possession, was out of the question, and with the Bertrand clan eliminated, the staffless villa would be equally impossible. The thing was to save Maxwell Tryte all extraneous worry, and get him back to work. Well, was Tryte in a state to be talked to with frankness?

Dr. Loviebond made his choice, and it was no cowardly one.

"Look here, my dear man, I don't want to keep you in a nursing-home."

Tryte looked frightened.

"I can't go back——"

"Of course not, yet. My idea is the Hotel Mimosa, and a quiet suite, and an hotel valet to give you a hand. What I want to do is to get you back to work."

Tryte's eyes brightened.

"Work? Do you think I——?"

"Of course. The delight in doing things. Meanwhile——"

"What about—that woman?"

"Can you bear candour?"

"Yes."

"I think her game is to assume that there has been a certain relationship, and to bank on it."

Again, Tryte looked scared.

"But—I've never—— I mean—I don't remember. Doctor, do you think—anything—could have happened in that way when I was drugged?"

"No. The very fact that you were drugged made that sort of intimacy—most unlikely."

"Thank the Lord—for that. You see, old man, I'm—attracted by—someone."

Loviebond's eyes twinkled. Here was a possible elixir.

"Is that so? Well, I'm glad."

"But—you see—if there was any nasty business, how could I——?"

"Is she quite young?"

"Quite. And so clean—— I may not have a chance, but——"

Dr. Loviebond smiled down his nose.

"Supposing I take on the Bertrand woman——?"

"You?"

"I mean—deal with her. How is finance?"

"Cash? Oh, not too bad—for the present."

Dr. Loviebond looked sly.

"Now, what about this? Write a letter to Madame—discharging her, and enclose a cheque for ten thousand francs. Could you manage that?"

"I could—but—wouldn't she——?"

"Leave that to me. I'll be the bearer of the letter and the cheque, and of something else."

Tryte put out an eager hand.

"Lovie—I'd like to call you that—you are the world's wildest sportsman. In the words of old Henry the Second——"

"Will no one rid me of this turbulent——"

"My god, yes."

"I think my plan might work."

XXVI

DR. LOVIEBOND drove to the Villa Violet. It was more seemly that on so serious an occasion he should arrive in the professional chariot. A solemn formalism was indicated, even to the wearing of a new pair of gloves. Dr. Loviebond rang the bell and waited, and while he waited he looked with profound appreciation at the villa's garden. What a flowery and peaceful spot, and what a snake had coiled itself amid the flowers!

The most undesirable Desiree opened the door.

"Yes, monsieur?"

Loviebond turned and raised his hat. It was to be an occasion of high manners.

"Is Madame Bertrand in?"

"Yes."

"I wish to see her."

"Will you wait in the salon, monsieur?"

"Thank you. How lovely the garden is looking."

Yes, Dr. Loviebond wore silk, vest, socks, and manners. Debonair was to be the word.

Josephine Bertrand did not keep him waiting. In fact, she had been treating Maxwell Tryte's villa as her own, and her work-basket stood on one of the salon's tables. She had retired for five minutes to tidy her hair and powder her face, for, in the battle she divined ahead of her, a woman should consider offence and defence. She sailed in with solid dignity. She too proposed to adopt an elevated attitude.

"Good morning, Monsieur. And how is Monsieur Tryte?"

She sat down, and pointed almost regally to a chair.

"Much better, I am glad to say. I have a letter for you, madame."

He produced it from a breast pocket, handed it to her, and took a chair, but not the one she had indicated. Josephine Bertrand was opening the envelope. Her strong white fingers drew out a sheet of notepaper and a cheque. Loviebond observed her as she read. Her heavy and handsome face remained inscrutable.

Then, she looked up and across at her visitor.

"I do not understand, monsieur."

"In what way, madame?"

"I am not Monsieur Tryte's housekeeper. A woman who is to be married is not—discharged. No, monsieur, I do this——"

She held the cheque between her two hands, but Loviebond's voice made her pause.

"I should not tear up the cheque, madame. It may be a very generous gratuity—after what has occurred."

She stared at him, head in air.

"And what authority——?"

"I am—as you know—Monsieur Tryte's doctor, and his health and peace of mind are my concern. We know now that he was drugged."

"You accuse me——?"

"And we know, madame, where the drug was procured, and by whom. Moreover, it would appear that certain of Mr. Tryte's letters have not reached him. Under the circumstances, and quite rightly so, Mr. Tryte wrote that letter."

She looked again at the cheque, and then laid it on the table.

"So—I'm to be—bribed——"

"Hardly, that, madame. Mr. Tryte is magnanimous in remembering some services. I should advise madame to accept that cheque."

Her big black eyes blazed sullenly.

"Services! Monsieur Tryte has—had more than service from me."

"Please be frank, madame. You suggest that you have been Mr. Tryte's mistress?"

"Monsieur insults me."

"No, for Mr. Tryte denies it. That cheque is no harlot's fee, madame."

"How dare you use such a word."

Loviebond smiled at her.

"Come, come, madame, it is you who claim intimacy. Believe me—it will not be wise of you to press that claim. You see, it may be a case for the lawyers and the police."

"You threaten me?"

"No, I advise you—to keep that cheque—not as a bribe—but——"

He saw the black and turgid rage swelling in her, and he lashed it before it could break. His voice was quiet and merciless.

"It was a cruel and an evil thing—that was done to my patient. In all my experience I have not met anything more cruel and heartless. You took a sick man, woman, and tried to keep him sick—for your own greedy ends. Now I have said—what I may have to say—if necessary—in a court of law. That is all, madame."

He rose, took his hat, and walked slowly to the door. She did not move, and he had a feeling that she knew her danger, and was choked by an angry sense of impotence, but as he closed the door he saw her reach for the cheque and glance at it. His impression was that she would not tear it up.

She did not.

Maxwell Tryte wrote a letter.

"Dear Rowena,

Forgive this humble scrawl. Believe it or not—I have become quite a creature of humility. The decor is different, and man more sane.

I'm afraid your letters went astray, and that hurts me, for—perhaps—I am not a man who deserves letters from such as you, and so—perhaps—they seem more precious.

I have a genius of a doctor. They have put me into a nursing-home for a while. How kind woman can be. I feel rather like an infant who is beginning life over again and differently. I needed chastening, and I have been chastened. And that is that.

Loviebond, my doctor, wants to get me back to work. I have a feeling that it is going to be a devil of a business, but I have got to face it. And here I am, talking about myself in the good old male way. Disgusting bore! But one does crave to talk to someone.

How is dear old Sam? I wish I had him out here. He is like a bottle of iron and strychnine; but the sugar is there too.

And how are you, and the dogs, and golf, and meditations upon man, woman, and the future? I am rather scared of the future. I wonder if you have ever been scared? Brute fear is a humiliating experience.

Write to me—if you can.

Ever yours sincerely,

MAX."

He wrote another letter to Valentine Samson, and when Samson had read it he smiled with a kind of compassionate and mischievous inwardness. Well, well, poor Max had shed his feathers! He was rather like a plucked cockerel, or a callow chick just out of the egg. He peeped with a new naturalness.

The poser and play-boy had become man, or perhaps—a frightened child, thanks to the peculiar activities of a particular bug.

Rowena's letter was lying on the Tanwood breakfast table, and Rowena was late, one of the privileges of the young who do not wake at five a.m. like the elderly, and lie in meditation. Sir Everard picked up the letter. France, St. Martin! The writing on the envelope made Sir Everard think of the laboured and sedulous script of a child. Was that fellow writing to his daughter? Sir Everard replaced the letter, and tweaked the winter purple of his prodigious nose.

Rowena swung in, kissed her father on the forehead, helped herself to coffee and porridge, and then discovered the thing beside her plate. Sir Everard was observing her. He saw her stand silent and still for a second or so, and then sit down, but she did not open her letter.

Her father was torn between the paternal desire to state an opinion and administer advice and the suspicion that the young spread their fingers at superfluous counsel. Well, he would have a talk to Sam about this business. Rowena might listen to the Navy.

But he did dare to ask a question.

"Had a letter from Maxwell Tryte?"

"I hope so," said his daughter, spooning up porridge.

Hope so! Damn it, did that mean——? But, Holy Moses, surely no child of his could see anything interesting in a dissolute little scribbling popinjay like Tryte? Sir Everard's prejudices were as prominent as his nose.

Rowena rose to collect bacon and eggs.

"Had a look at it, pater?"

"Well, I just——"

"Why not? Fatherly care."

"Does he always write like that?"

"How?"

"Like a child learning to do copy book?"

Rowena took two rashers and one egg. Her father could not see her face at the moment, and it was peculiarly revealing.

"Pater."

"Yes, my dear?"

"Supposing you couldn't manage a gun or a golf-club, and had to learn all over again?"

Sir Everard was lighting a cigarette, and that challenging question made him hold the match until it burned his fingers. He dropped it hurriedly into his coffee cup.

"Well, yes. I should feel—a bit——"

"Quite," said his daughter, "and Max's hand is—well I won't say what. And he has to re-teach it, poor lad."

Sir Everard felt crushed and reproved. Well, yes, there was something in that, but he did want to protest against the use of the word "Lad." The fellow was forty or so, and had lived the life, but women were women, and you could not dragoon Rowena.

When Rowena had finished her breakfast, and her father had gone to the gun-room rather like an old dog who was feeling the disgrace of his years, she sat down on a tuffet before the fire and read Max's letter. It gave her to think—did that letter, and it gave her to feel. This was not the Max of the Decor Days, or perhaps it was the same Max reclothed in a garment of strange humility. He talked of being frightened; he could envisage himself in the part of a self-absorbed bore. She felt it to be the letter of a man who was scared and lonely, and who had a live problem before him, the grim adventure of finding out whether—as a craftsman—he was finished. Rowena divined that. To her the letter seemed to seethe with a secret dread. Even the young tigress may be tame towards a wounded cub.

So, they had put him in a nursing-home. That did not sound too good. How kind women were. Supposing some pretty nurse proved too kind? Gosh, what was she thinking of? Could your emotional self quake like some silly pink jelly?

But Rowena was in a very downright mood. She took the car and drove to Maythorn to find Uncle Sam out with Will and the sprayer, giving the fruit trees their winter wash. Valentine Samson was in the most disgraceful of old mackintoshes and a dastardly hat, and looking R.N. in spite of them.

Rowena felt foot-faulted by fate.

"Oh, I see you're full up for the morning."

"What's the time?"

"Half past ten—or thereabouts."

"We knock off at eleven for fifteen minutes. If you care to wait and can put up with the stink of this stuff——"

"I'll wait," said Rowena.

"Go in and get Treasure to give you a cup of coffee. I have one. Will—I believe—has ginger beer."

Will chuckled as he plugged away at the pump.

"I ask—ee, Miss, do I look like ginger-beer?"

She answered with a strange seriousness that was not lost upon Valentine Samson.

"No, Will, you look like the Rising Sun."

"Thank-ee, Miss, though maybe I be nearer the setting than him as be rising."

Rowena sat on a stool before Uncle Sam's fire, with a cup of coffee on the informal floor, beside her. Treasure had produced the coffee and a round smile, and secret appreciation of my lady's looks and pose. Miss Rowena was a witch, she was. Rowena lit a cigarette, and watched Mrs. Treasure poke and feed the fire, and the play of it on her happy, wholesome face and greying hair. Some day—she—would have grey in her hair. What a thought! But the Ravenstock women turned grey early. And would she dye it? Perhaps. Did it matter at the moment?

Then Samson came in, minus mackintosh and hat, and lit his eleven o'clock pipe, and received his cup of coffee.

"I have tried to shed the smell of cresol, my dear."

"I don't mind it. I have just heard from Max."

The sailor gave her a discerning look, and sat down in his chair.

"That's a coincidence. So have I."

"He's in a nursing-home."

"So he says."

There was a moment's silence, and then Rowena, with eyes on the fire, asked that disconcerting question.

"What did he tell you, Uncle, that he did not tell me?"

Valentine Samson pulled at his pipe.

"Isn't that rather a poser?"

"How?"

"Well, my dear, how should I know——?"

"If you tell me what he told you."

"Is that quite fair—to Max?"

"That would depend, wouldn't it—on what he told you?"

Valentine Samson laughed.

"You young sophist. And upon what authority?"

"None. But I just want to know. Why did they put him in a nursing-home? What happened to my letters?"

Now Valentine Samson had heard the whole story, but how much of it, if any, should he pass on to Rowena? And was this just feminine curiosity—or some deeper interest? He gazed questioningly at the bowl of his pipe.

"Come along, Uncle. I'm serious. And I'm—a responsible person."

"Are you—indeed! Well, I think I might tell you that they moved Max because the atmosphere of the Villa Violet was—well——"

"Septic," said she, sharply.

Now, how the devil did the wench know that?

"Well, in a way——"

"That French dame. A bad hat and French at that. Do you know what I believe, Uncle?"

"You seem to believe——"

"A damned lot. I do. It was she who pocketed my letters. Well, what was the foul idea? To keep Max a sick man, and retain—control. And——"

Samson looked hard at her.

"Not far out."

"What a bitch!"

"My dear!"

"Language is for expression, Uncle. Did you always wear nice white gloves and a curate's face—when——?"

"I did not. Well, I'll say this much, poor Max has been up against things. He seems to have a damned good doctor. His doctor wants to get him back to work."

"Exactly. And Max is scared stiff."

Again, Valentine Samson looked at her sharply.

"Your intuition seems to be——"

"Right on the mark, Uncle. I think I know just how Max must be feeling. Horribly afraid that his craft won't come back."
And Samson nodded gravely.
"Yes, my dear, just that."

XXVII

ROWENA had money of her own, a legacy from her mother, so, when she announced that she was going to the south of France, her father was in a quandary. Should he protest, or assume that the pilgrimage was sporting? There seemed to be no way of saving his nose other than by just blowing it to save his face.

"Going for the pat-ball shows?"

"Yes," said she, "I want some practice. Kooseloo is pro-ing at Beaulieu. He taught me a lot last year."

Sir Everard blew his nose, cleared his throat, and accepted the forwardness of his daughter. No use trying to coerce Rowena. She was like her mother. Did he not remember his wife's most characteristic phrase, "Everard, don't be—portentious." If he put up a hurdle it would prove a provocation to this proud filly. Jump it, she would. And Sir Everard had spoken to comrade Sam.

"What's one to do with a girl—who——?"

"Leave her alone, my lad. Rowena is her mother's daughter."

"Yes, that's just the trouble."

"And was your wife a fool?"

"Well, she married me!"

"So you haven't a leg to stand on."

The Hotel Mimosa was offering Mr. Tryte a suite on the first floor with a view of the hotel garden and the sea, and though

the Hotel Mimosa was so exclusive that it was a little blasé as to celebrities, Mr. Maxwell Tryte was so distinguished a person that the hotel regarded him as an asset to its visitors' list. Dr. Loviebond had interviewed the management and also the valet who would serve Max Tryte. François was dark and bright of eye and intelligent, and the doctor explained to François that Mr. Tryte had been a very sick man and would need fathering.

The Hotel Mimosa would have to wait a week or two for its distinguished guest. Dr. Loviebond had other fish to fry, and he was hoping that he had provided the frying-pan. It was a mistral day, the blue sea white fanged and the cypresses aslant when he drove to the Villa Violet, to find Roberto all muffled up as for an arctic journey. Roberto was tying up roses which had come adrift, and wearing the melancholy face of an Italian in bad weather, but when he saw Dr. Loviebond, a brilliant grin flashed upon his face.

"Well, Roberto, anyone at home?"

Roberto flourished a knife.

"They have gone, monsieur, gone—like—I wish this wind would go. Yes, and I laugh."

"Gone? Madame Bertrand—and——"

Roberto used some phrase which—translated—amounted to the whole damned caboodle.

Dr. Loviebond simulated surprise.

"How very extraordinary! When did it happen?"

"Yesterday. Madame threw the keys at me. That woman has the evil eye. I was coming to tell the master."

"I'll tell him, Roberto. I think you had better take charge."

"I will, monsieur, and gladly."

"Where have they all gone?"

"To a bad place, I hope, monsieur."

Again Dr. Loviebond said: "Most extraordinary, and most inconsiderate."

So, the diplomatic threat, plus bribe, had worked, and the Bertrand clan had discovered discretion in retreat, but had Dr. Loviebond attempted to trace Josephine he would have failed. She had cashed her cheque, purloined a number of useful and minor articles, and vanished, nor was Max's cheque her only

plunder. For years she had been robbing him, and receiving little commissions from tradesmen, and when Josephine Bertrand sailed from Marseilles for Algeria, she was a woman of some capital and a future. Long ago she had cast an eye upon a particular estaminet in a North African town, visited and traversed by tourists. She spoke English, she had a manner, and an elastic conscience. She had failed to snare the bird of paradise, but there were other birds and other businesses. So, it came about that Josephine Bertrand bought her estaminet, and elevated it gradually to the level of a highly chic road-house. She became very much Madame, and catered expensively and with taste for English and Americans. Her porter, a strapping and glistening Seinegalese, gorgeously arrayed in white, and blue and gold, provided Madame with other satisfactions, but if he possessed a particular and intimate habitat in her sexual economy, she kept him in his place. Her sensual hardness never lost its polish.

In a playful mood, Dr. Loviebond drove to the Bella Vista. Now—it would be safe for his patient to pass to the Hotel Mimosa. He found Max up and dressed, and sitting by his window. He had a sketching block on his knees, but the white surface was virginal.

Dr. Loviebond was looking sly.

"Well, my dear Mr. Tryte, everything in the garden is lovely."

"Why this formalism?"

"I have just seen Roberto. The enemy evacuated the position yesterday, with horse, foot, and artillery."

"You mean—she has skedadddled?"

"Completely so. Wise woman. The bird in the hand——"

Max Tryte looked pensive and somewhat sad.

"It has hurt me, you know, Lovie. I rather thought that—Josephine——"

"Shattered illusions."

Max grinned whimsically.

"Oh, well, vanity, vanity. She fooled me, and I suppose the fool always feels a little sore. Tell me, Lovie, has France ever produced a Florence Nightingale?"

"I can't remember one. I think the French ladies are more

militant. Joan of Arc, or—in other activities—Charlotte Corday.”

“The one who knifed a fellow in his bath. Well, she had me in the bath. But for you——”

Dr. Loviebond changed the subject. His eyes were on the sketching pad.

“Going to try your hand?”

Max Tryte looked out of the window.

“I was. And then——”

“And then?”

“I fuked it.”

Dr. Loviebond’s smile was compassionate.

“I—think I understand, old man. One can be so much more afraid of the so much than of the so little. But you will do it.”

“I wonder?”

“Oh yes, you will. It may take a little time and patience, but you will.”

Maxwell Tryte looked up at him with eyes that were strangely sad.

“Thanks, Lovie. But—is it worth while? Is my stuff worth while? I’ve begun to wonder.”

Dr. Loviebond shook his head at him.

“Mustn’t feel like that. You—of all people. I’m going to ask you to give me the first thing you do. I’ll put it beside my Cezanne.”

Max looked at him rather like a grateful but doubting dog.

“That may be a poor—presentation. Somehow—I feel I want help, a damned lot of help, some new sort of urge.”

“Well, why shouldn’t it come?”

So, Maxwell Tryte said good-bye to Miss Starkie and his big blonde nurse, and was transferred to his suite at the Hotel Mimosa. Loviebond saw him settled in, with the help of the good François who had the blessed gift of being practical and kind without flourishes or French fuss. As a matter of fact the hotel residents were quite excited about the coming of that brilliant and rather dreadful fellow—Maxwell Tryte. Such is

fame and its aftermath. Poor Max was feeling neither brilliant nor dreadful, but like last year's cream-cheese in spectacles.

Max took his first meals in the privacy of his suite. The floor-waiter, a little dark fellow from Bayonne, was helpful. Pierre and François were a happy combination, and Marie the floor-maid was fat and good tempered. For a day or two Max went no further than his balcony. He indulged himself in sweet inertia, but like a prisoner who is waiting to be tried. The ultimate ordeal lay before him, and he procrastinated, and made excuses which did not deceive his secret and brittle self. There was no hurry. He would get a little stronger, and then——

He knew quite well that the "And then" was like some merciless taskmaster waiting for him, and he was afraid, bitterly afraid. Had the old cunning gone from him? He dreaded sitting down at the examination-table to attempt to answer the most exacting question man can be fated to answer.

Was he finished, or was he not?

The Hotel Mimosa contained the usual assortment of elderly women with nothing to do but sit in the sun and listen to St. Martin's orchestra, play bridge, and dare some mild gambling at the casino. Food mattered considerably, and the Mimosa's food was excellent. Some of the more hardy of these ladies climbed the mountains like lean and bearded goats. The more indolent and less lean sat in the garden or on the hotel terrace and gossiped.

The topic of the moment concerned the first public appearance of Maxwell Tryte. Something very he-man and decorative and provoking was to be expected. Lady Marsland, a splendid and massive blonde, and the Queen of Snobs, who had assumed the leadership of the Mimosa's social scheme, let it be known that—she—had met Maxwell Tryte, but Lady Marsland had met everybody who mattered.

"A most arrestive person. The man has the most mesmeric eyes."

Still, the Master lingered, and the hotel's curiosity remained on edge until Lady Marsland made the discovery that a particular balcony was Mr. Maxwell Tryte's, and that a figure

in a grey overcoat sat there. Lady Marsland produced a pair of opera-glasses, and having made use of them herself, passed them with regal condescension to the lady beside her.

"Like to look?"

"Thank you so much; I would."

The unsuspecting Maxwell Tryte was wearing spectacles and a white woolly scarf bunched up under his chin. It could not be said that he was an arrestive figure.

"Are you sure, dear Lady Marsland?"

"Quite."

"But he is wearing spectacles. You said something about his mesmeric eyes."

"You must remember, my dear, that Mr. Maxwell Tryte has been very ill."

"Yes. But he looks quite small, and old, and not at all—exciting."

Lady Marsland smiled her most patronizing smile.

"My dear Miss Smith, it is the privilege of celebrated people to appear—quite—undistinguished. I have met so many, and I know. Those who look somebodies are usually nobodies, and vice-versa."

"How very disappointing," said Miss Smith.

Max's first appearance in the hotel garden could not be described as exciting, but it did provoke facile compassion, and he was not asking for compassion. He walked with a stick, limped slightly on one leg, and looked all tucked up. Nor was there anything mesmeric in the eyes behind those lenses. His one desire was to avoid and to be avoided, and he pottered off towards a solitary chair which waited in the sunlight.

Lady Marsland had seen him, and she sailed in pursuit. Behind a most handsome façade she did not conceal a handsome interior. Barbara—Lady Marsland had been three times married; had divorced one husband and buried two others. The unkind said of her that she had talked the first into adultery, and the second and third into their graves. She had the bluest of blue eyes and the sweetest manner imaginable, unless she was balked, when she could betray her origin, and quite vulgarly so.

"Excuse me, Mr. Maxwell Tryte, I think?"

Tryte paused in the middle of the path. He happened to know Lady Marsland by sight and reputation, and in his naughty days he had christened her "Johovah's Barmaid." In fact—she might have ridden in some carnival chariot as the "Queen of The Barmoids," and a super-blonde at that.

"Yes, I am afraid so."

Lady Marsland was utterly deaf so far as verbal subtleties were concerned, nor could you switch her off like some boring gabbler on the wireless.

"I do hope you are feeling better. We have all been so concerned——"

Now, Maxwell Tryte might be feeling depressed and lonely, but he was wise as to women, or to some women, and he had no wish to be clasped to a super-egoistical bosom and exhibited as a forlorn captive. For five minutes he might be soused in sugared sympathy, and then be held in a corner to listen to the lady's self-congratulating chatter. In conversation Lady Marsland flung earls and dukes about as though they were bouquets at a Battle of Flowers.

"Very kind of you, madam. I am just going to sit in the sun."

"How right! I'll get another chair."

"Please take this one."

Lady Marsland fell into the trap. She subsided graciously and with an upward and magnificent smile.

Max Tryte limped on. He continued to limp on until he was hidden by a grove of bamboos. And he did not return. Lady Marsland was left sitting—solus.

It may be a matter for regret that a man of Max Tryte's calibre should be driven to play the curmudgeon by benignant bores. There should have been a notice posted in the foyer of the Hotel Mimosa—"Please do not speak to Mr. Maxwell Tryte. He does not want to be talked to," but if the hotel could not talk to him, it talked of him. The kind and the comprehending left him in peace, knowing perhaps from personal experience that when you have been sick unto death, amiable chatter can be just exhausting noise. The less kind, led by Lady

Marsland, discussed Maxwell Tryte's work and his reputation. It was a somewhat dreadful reputation. Wine, woman and what-not! As for his painting and his books they were—of course—clever, too clever, but decadent and pathological, and new age, and so rude—like the new young. And just how old was Maxwell Tryte? *Who's Who* proved him to be thirty-nine, but Lady Marsland laughed unpleasantly at this statement. A poser like Tryte was as vain as any woman. Had he given his true age? Of course not. The man looked fifty and shabby at that. He had lived a dissipated and sticky life and was suffering for it. Almost, Lady Marsland might have said: "I am not a censorious woman, but though the mills of God grind slowly—"

We may suffer in secret, especially those of us who are hypersensitive and aloof, and Maxwell Tryte felt himself bricked up in a cell of fear, frustration, and loneliness. The Hotel Mimosa was full of well-fed people who had no desperate urge to vex them, and the Hotel Mimosa, in spite of the kindness of François, Pierre, and Marie, was not proving salubrious for Max Tryte's soul. François and Pierre appeared to respect and understand the artist in Maxwell Tryte, perhaps because he too was a worker and did difficult things and did them well, but to the somewhat idle and pleasure-seeking crowd Max was a "Show Piece" who refused to be shown.

He kept to his suite and the garden. When he descended in the lift and passed through the hall, it was with the uneasy and limping haste and don't touch me face of a man who did not wish for contacts. He wrote letters, and nothing else. Inspiration seemed dead in him. He sat about with the unhappy air of a man who felt finished.

Dr. Lovicbond was troubled. The Hotel Mimosa did not appear to suit his patient's temperament.

"Started work yet, Max?"

"No."

"Well, I shall expect something to-morrow."

It was a healer's ultimatum, and that same afternoon Max sat down with sketching block and pencil. What should he attempt to put on paper? Lady Marsland? Why not? His

scared right hand set to work, but though it roughed out a human face and figure—the thing seemed crude and infantile.

“Oh, my god, I can’t do it!”

He flung the sketching block aside, and Pierre, happening to come in with Max Tryte’s tea, found him in tears. Pierre was shocked. He was sensitive and intelligent, and all that he could say was with quick gentleness: “Your tea, monsieur,” and from a man’s tears he fled.

Dr. Loviebond, looking in that evening, saw the discarded sketching-block and picked it up.

“Good man, you’ve started.”

Tryte sat sunk in his chair.

“No good, Lovie. Just ga-ga.”

“I don’t agree.”

“Know who it is?”

“The Duchess of Marsland. Excellent.”

“Tripe.”

“Who, the lady?”

“No, my—work.”

“Nonsense,” said Loviebond. “May I have it?”

“You don’t really want it?”

“Yes I do.”

Loviebond sat down with the block and stripped the sheet from it.

“Look here, old man, you’re not feeling like Hotel Mimosa.”

“Too many old women of both sexes.”

“Do you feel like going back to the villa?”

“How can I? No staff. Couldn’t cope with things.”

“There are Roberto and his wife. And I could look around for you.”

“Thanks, Lovie. I just feel like a sack of potatoes, and last year’s at that.”

“Well, you have got to feel like new potatoes. I am going to prescribe. A car will call for you at eleven each morning. I’ll order the car. It will drive you down to the Plage. You will walk for half an hour. You will sit on a seat for half an hour in the sun, and look at the sea—and people.”

Tryte smiled at him sadly.

"Anything to please you, Lovie. Why not a bath-chair?"

"Bath-chairs be damned!"

XXVIII

NO one said to Maxwell Tryte "You have been warned." Moreover, any such warning might have scared him. In the old days it would have made him combative or sarcastic, for, of all men the artist resents interference. The Official World was anathema to him, a provocation to irony and scorn, calling up contempt of the creator for the card-index mind. He had had battles with the Inland Revenue, and had enjoyed them, and had wasted wit upon gentlemen who remained always "Your Obedient Servant." Tryte remembered asking a humourless inspector: "I'm a damned good customer, and an hotel or a shop would treat me as such, but to you fellows I might be a blackleg. Why the devil don't you cultivate some grace?" Tryte could suppose that all that unlaughing dullness came from sitting in a chair and messing about with other people's money. The sterile will always resent the fertility of the fertile.

Yes, Maxwell Tryte had no warning. He was driven down daily to the plage, and walked for half an hour, if pottering along with the aid of a stick could be called walking, and sat in a chair sheltered by a little grove of shrubs and trees, and blinked through his glasses at the sea. His eyes grew tired too easily, especially so in that brilliant southern sunlight. Human shadows that were people passed him by. It seemed to him a strange, muffled sort of world where the very footfalls of other humans were soundless and distant. His inward self seemed far away, and served by senses that were vague and purposeless. The creative fire was very low in him, just the ash of yesterday faintly aglow in a mess of greyness.

Once or twice he was driven to the Villa Violet, where Roberto and his wife were caretaking, and in spite of Roberto's southern smiles and the floweriness of the garden, the Villa Violet depressed him. It was a symbol of his old, confident self when his craft had seemed so easy, and he had played the impudent philosopher and castigator of the conventions. What impudence was there left in him now? His very studio and library were relics of a potent past where the tools of his craft might lie about like the tools of a man who was dead. Moreover, the gay villa had an unpleasant flavour for him, a smell of treachery and false pity. Here—he—the wit and wiseacre had been fooled by woman.

"The master will be coming home soon?"

"I don't know, Roberto."

"My wife—she can cook. It would be easy to engage a girl. We miss you, Maestro."

Maestro—indeed!

"Thank you, Roberto. You have been a good friend to me. One does not forget."

Roberto filled up the car with flowers, and with sad and southern eyes watched what seemed to be the ghost of a man drive away. Poor Maestro! What a shadow was he of his old, gay self! Roberto rubbed his hands pensively on his blue-breeched buttocks.

The car pulled up beside the promenade, opposite the Café Anglais under whose blue and gold awning people were sitting at little green tables. In the old days the Café Anglais had been a happy haunt of Max's, but now he glanced at it like a very old man to whom the minor dissipations of life have been forbidden. His doctors had cut out little drinks, nor did Max desire them. He could say with a whimsical grin: "Lovie, I seem to be growing quite apostolic. Even a mild vermouth does not pique me."

The chauffeur helped him out of the car, and handed him his stick.

"Shall I wait for monsieur here?"

"Yes, Jean. I'll pick you up here."

Maxwell Tryte limped off along the promenade. He was observed by one particular person, and by others.

Said a fat and final gentleman to his vis-a-vis:

"Know who that was?"

"You mean the poor old crock who got out of the car?"

"I do. Not so old either. That was Maxwell Tryte."

"Tryte! The fellow who——?"

"I can't read his stuff. Too impudent."

"Doesn't look impudent—now. Little old owl in spectacles."

A girl sitting next to them gave a toss of the head, and rose from her chair. Her dark eyes flashed down at the two valetudinarians.

"Two old crows at a table—cawing crackers."

The gentlemen were startled. Had the young woman uttered those words? She had. Incredible rudeness! What were the young coming to?

Maxwell Tryte pattered along, pausing now and again to lean upon the railings and look at the sea. To-day it was a very placid sea, making baby-prattle against the rocks. Gulls, querulous and restless, dipped their feet into it as they circled and swooped, attracted by a human figure that might represent a bag of broken biscuits or stale croissants. Italy jutted out dimly in the blue hazed distance. Tryte strolled on, past the high white cliffed houses of the old town with coloured etceteras hanging like bunting from their windows. He came to the harbour where the water was always a marvellously pellucid blue, a mirror for the mountains, and the yachts and fishing-boats at rest here. An old fellow was unloading a catch of fish under the eyes of a small crowd. From a shabby coaster dirty men were carrying baskets of coke. A speed-boat dashed in, breaking the tranquil surface like a stone thrown at a sheet of blue glass.

Tryte watched the scene for a few minutes and then turned back towards the promenade and his particular seat. He was conscious of strolling and of little else, nor had he noticed that a motionless figure fifty yards or so away had turned when he had turned. He reached the seat under the shelter of the glistening green foliage, and sat down there. He had the seat to himself and he was glad.

The girl had turned and was coming back. She did not hurry and her young face was intensely serious. Her eyes were fixed upon the seated figure, muffled up, bespectacled, hands folded over the crook of its stick. And—that—was Maxwell Tryte, Blondie of the brilliant waistcoats and the blue-lined cloaks! His blond beard had grown again, but it looked meagre and unaggressive. He seemed to be staring at his feet, and she realized that he was unaware of the world about him. What a transfiguration! The young of the new age are supposed to be tough and lacking in sentiment, but that lonely, vacant faced figure on the seat roused in Rowena a spasm of profound compassion.

She was standing over him before she spoke.

"Hallo, Max!"

He had been utterly unaware of her, not even noticing a pair of pretty legs. His head gave a jerk; the lenses of his glasses glimmered. His mouth fell open. His expression was that of a man poignantly surprised and frightened.

"My God!"

"Lost in meditation, what?"

He half rose and fell back. His hands seemed to clutch at the crook of the stick. She sat down beside him.

"When did you——?"

"Yesterday."

She saw a hand go up and twitch off his spectacles. There was something wounded about his eyes. Vanity of vanities! To be caught at that supreme moment in those damned goggles!

"Well, I—— Staying here?"

"The Splendide. Going to play tennis. The local show opens next week."

"Play tennis. Of course. I'm at the Mimosa."

"Like it?"

"Not much."

And then he sank into utter silence, dangling the spectacles in one hand, and staring at her knees. Did she divine what was passing inside him? Possibly. Perhaps more than she herself realized at the moment.

"Well, how are things, Max?"

His eyes rose slowly to her face, and seemed to search it with a kind of anguish.

"Oh, not too bad. Your father with you?"

"No."

His glance faltered, fell away. His chin seemed to be quivering. Good God, was he going to blub? And she, shocked to a new sensitiveness by his poor, inept, dumb self, suddenly reached out a hand and took the glasses from him. She put them on.

"Well, how do I look?"

"Don't, my dear. They——"

"Make a man look more distinguished, and a woman like a ruddy highbrow. No, hands off. I'm going to keep them for a while."

He looked at her with a sudden tentative little smile that was like a frightened hand groping in the dark.

"Why didn't you——?"

"Why—what?"

"Let me know?"

She took his stick and traced figures on the ground.

"Ask me another, Max. I—don't—know."

Maxwell Tryte's French chauffeur kept looking at his watch. Monsieur was late; monsieur was nowhere in sight. What should be done about it? Had Monsieur Tryte walked too far and overtired himself? The man got into the car, proposing to drive slowly along the promenade in search of the gentleman who was overdue.

He had started his engine when he saw the two figures. The lady wore spectacles and was swinging a stick. Monsieur Tryte was without his spectacles, and was carrying his hat and coat, and walking with a new air of aliveness, almost of gaiety. The chauffeur watched them for a second or two, and then switched off his engine.

Said Max: "I've got a car here. Any idea what the time is?"

Rowena looked at her wrist watch.

"About half past eleven. I say, you——"

"Would you?"

"What?"

"Come for a drive. We might. Do you know that place on the upper Corniche, right on the edge of the cliff?"

"No. It sounds good to me."

"Let's go and lunch there."

"Great idea."

"You mean—you will come?"

"I'm a greedy little beast."

He was looking at her as he had never looked at a woman before.

"No. You're everything that ever was. There is only one condition."

"What?"

"You take off those damned glasses, and return them——"

They had reached the car, and the chauffeur was looking discreetly at the mountains. Rowena removed the spectacles. She passed them to Max, who put them on, while she held his overcoat and hat for him.

"Jean——"

"Monsieur?"

"We want to go and lunch at the Reserve de la Bastide. Know it?"

"Yes, monsieur, but——"

"But what?"

"I have an engagement, monsieur, for the afternoon."

"Forget all about it. I'll pay for all damages."

The man grinned a very human grin.

"Bien, monsieur."

He got out to open the door.

Said Rowena: "Put on your overcoat, Max."

"Must I?"

"Of course. No palaver. Come along."

She helped him on with his coat.

The two gentlemen were still at their little green table across the way, watching the scene. Maybe their drinks had warmed them to a new humanism.

"I say—the fellow looks—ten years younger. Isn't that the wench who——?"

"The same."

"Bossy young bit. Did you see the way she made the fellow get into his coat?"

His vis-a-vis nodded.

"Well, I wouldn't mind being——"

And there was silence, the silence of old men pensive with visions of what had been and was dead.

XXIX

A VAST window, and a vastness of sea and sky. A table for two in this same window, and an almost too polite waiter presenting the menu. Maxwell Tryte took off his spectacles. Rowena, elbows on table, her chin on her hands, looked down at the panorama below, little tumbling hills, olive groves, pines leaning over precipices, a cluster of grey houses with brown tiled roofs, the pale loops of a road. What space, what freedom! You could float here like a bird.

"Soup or——"

"Oh, I leave it to you."

She turned to meet his eyes.

"But I thought you said——"

She smiled.

"One could live on air up here. You order."

The menu was comprehensive and luxurious, and Maxwell Tryte ordered everything that was special. Then, the wine list. Should it be champagne? Rowena was looking seawards, and her profile seemed too exquisite for vulgar fizz. Max Tryte ran a finger down the clarets, and chose a bottle from a particular and most historic vineyard.

"Care for a cocktail?"

She shook her head.

"I don't need it. Do you?"

"Never less so."

"Just look down there. It's too marvellous."

They looked, and were silent. A sudden exquisite shyness seemed to possess them, a sense of strange intimacy that held them mute. Rowena gazed at sea and sky, and Maxwell Tryte gazed at Rowena. He left his spectacles lying where they were.

The first course came. Rowena picked up an olive, looked at it, and then across the table. A man's two hands. And Max's right hand held a fork, yet with a slight suggestion of cramped effort. She looked away, and put the olive to her lips. How much and how little could manifest in a hand!

As for the man opposite he had become almost too conscious of the lovely texture of her youth, skin, eyes and hair, an unblemished freshness that tantalized him, and made him afraid, and in looking at this dark eyed girl he was looking at himself, Max Tryte the satirical hedonist sitting there like some trembling boy with no lout's impudence left in him! What a transformation! Or was he like some man grown prematurely senile provoked by the passion of youth, while remaining conscious of his own shabby ineptitude? He had been like a man dead, and here was new life-blood singing in him. It hurt, like the flow of blood into fingers that have been numbed by cold. What bitter-sweet anguish was this!

The silence worried him. He fumbled for words, he who had been so glib.

"How is everybody at home?"

She gave him a Mona Lisa look.

"Oh, as usual. Heard from Uncle Sam?"

He flinched. How much did she know?

"Several times. Great man. I used to laugh at the Silent Service."

"Why not now?"

"The spirit is chastened. May I ask you something?"

"Of course."

But again he flinched.

"No, I retract. The flabby fool in one isn't pleasant to contemplate."

Their plates were being changed, and she waited.

"Then—why contemplate it?"

He looked at her mouth. It seemed more full lipped and softer than of old.

"Good for one's vanity."

"You weren't so vain as you pretended."

"Thank you, my dear. Not much of that left."

"Isn't a little of it right and necessary? You must feel sure of your game."

Once more there was silence. The dark wine was in their glasses. Maxwell Tryte fingered the stem of his, and raised it.

"Here's to your—game. May I come and watch?"

She looked at her glass.

"I may be off it; you never know. And it wouldn't worry me."

"I shouldn't like to see you beaten."

"Then keep away. Besides, isn't taking a licking part of life?"

His glass was poised and remained so. It was as though those words of hers had revealed him to himself.

"True, oh—Queen. One can be so——"

"So—what?"

"So cravenly frightened."

She gave him a sudden gentle look.

"Well, hadn't you reason to be? I should have been scared stiff."

Once again the waiter was busy about them, and other waiters were busy about other people. There was clatter and conversation. They looked about them like two creatures who were rather breathless and needed a pause.

The meal went on.

She said: "I suppose you know all these places?"

"I did."

"Why not now?"

"They seem rather—different."

"Just how?"

"Not so—inevitable. Just froth and bubbles."

"Do you want a world without froth and bubbles?"

Max glanced at his own right hand.

"No, perhaps not, but the juice of the grape is the juice of the grape."

She had noticed that glance of his, and she was silent for some seconds. Then, from her firm young lips fell that question:

"Working yet?"

Almost a look of anguish seared his face; she saw it, and it touched her.

"No, not—really—working."

"Tried at all?"

"Oh, fumbled a bit."

He did not say that he was funking it, but she divined the fear and his flight from a confession. The meal was over and the cloth clear before them. Max had ordered coffee. He felt for his cigarette case, to discover that he had forgotten it. Rowena was opening her bag.

"Don't worry. I've got some."

She produced a case and a lighter, but continued to explore the interior of her bag. Then she found what she wanted, and rolled it across the cloth to him.

A pencil!

Maxwell Tryte stared at it as though some unpleasant insect had invaded the white surface.

"Try now. Me."

"You?"

"Yes, why not?"

"I shall spoil the cloth."

She offered him her cigarette case, but he shook his head.

"Don't talk tosh about spoiling the cloth. They'll hang it on the wall. Study of a girl by Maxwell Tryte. Spoiling the cloth, my foot!"

Maxwell Tryte stared at the pencil. Dared he? And she was so near, so confident, so hurting. He would have to dare. He reached for the pencil. She turned sideways on her chair as though posing for her profile. She had a feeling that he did not want to be watched.

He glanced at her and then at the cloth. His fingers began to move. The waiter arrived with the coffee, a scandalized waiter.

"Pardon, monsieur. Monsieur will spoil a clean cloth. It is not—reasonable."

Max glanced at him.

"I'll buy the cloth."

But the waiter, holding the coffee tray in one hand, deftly plucked the cloth from the table with the other. Rowena's eyes flashed at him.

"Imbecile. I suppose you have never heard of Maxwell Tryte?"

Her French was adequate.

"No, madame, I have not."

Rowena's face said: "More fool you."

Tryte let the pencil roll away. He was conscious of cowardly relief, but Rowena's fingers pushed it back to him. "Ask for the bill, Max. You can draw me on the back of the bill. The idiot can't snatch that away."

He looked at her appealingly.

"Must I? If I could do you—justice."

Their eyes met, and something in her relented.

"Poor lad, you're——"

Lad! Did she see him in that way? Damn it—he would try.

"Garçon, the bill."

"Oui—monsieur."

They sat and looked at each other.

The bill arrived on a plate. Maxwell Tryte paid it and the waiter marched off with the bill and notes. Rowena, her elbows on the table, watched the smoke rising from her cigarette. Her young dark dignity had lost its fierceness.

"Poor dear, are you so frightened?"

Max flinched. Did he want her pity?

"Yes, damnably frightened."

"Of——"

"Everything."

"But it's brave of you to say so."

"Thank you. You see—when a craft begins to crumble——"

She watched the smoke.

"You plug cement into it, like they do into old houses. I don't mean you are an antique."

"And what is the cement?"

"Isn't that for you to find out?"

The waiter returned with the bill and the change. Max took the bill and left the change on the plate. The waiter thanked him and withdrew. Tryte turned the bill over, picked up the pencil, and looked at her with sudden steadfastness.

"What shall we call it, if there is an it?"

"Girl smoking cigarette."

"Something better than that. Diana and Man at Crossroads."

"If you like."

"It is man who is at the crossroads, not you."

He began to draw, glancing at her from time to time. She remained utterly still, looking out of the window, and her stillness helped him. His fingers moved with a new fluidity. There was no tremor, no hesitation. Maxwell Tryte had been noted for the mordant swiftness and almost terrible certainty of his cartoons and caricatures, the way that—with a few sweeps of the pencil or brush—he could put a person pitilessly on paper. It had not made him popular. He was—perhaps—the first of the moderns to present humans with faces and heads like eggs, and to compress into that oval a vacuous likeness that caused egoists to squirm. Tryte had been able to out-Punch *Punch* in his merciless caricaturing of the vulgar and the vapid, especially so in its female types, but this business was very different. He was attempting to put exquisite youth on the back of a restaurant bill, and to do it as a lover desired to do it, and that made it infinitely more of an ordeal. He began with a kind of rigid eagerness and without a tremor, became hesitant, frowned over it. The thing seemed crude and cold to him, perhaps because he had never attempted so passionate and devoted a piece of work as this.

He paused. His fingers fidgeted with a suggestion of conscious dissatisfaction. He dropped the pencil on the table, and she turned to look. She seemed to divine what he was about to do, for, before his hand could close upon the piece of paper and crumple it, she had snatched it from him.

His expression was piteous.

"Don't—Rowena."

"What."

"Don't look."

But look she did, with a little caressing smile in her eyes.

"What's the matter? I think it——"

"It's not you, not as I see you."

"But—Max, it's—— But—why?"

His hands were clasped on the table.

"Because I see you—as I can't somehow put you on paper. It's too big, too complex, and yet too simple. Give it me back."

She shook her head and then smiled straight into his eyes.

"No, my dear, I'll keep it—until—you think you have done the thing as you want it done."

"That may be never."

XXX

FOR, when he had descended from the heights and left her at her hotel, and was alone and without the provocation of her exquisite freshness and her confidence, he sank back into a mood of profound self-mistrust. The delight of being with her had carried him to the heights, and had both stimulated and soothed him, but the descent into reality was utter gloom. He might have been some imaginative and hypersensitive boy, hopelessly in love, and moving between ecstasy and despair, and not Maxwell Tryte, the witty and impudent hedonist to whom woman had been no more than a flower or a perfume.

The hotel lift carried him to the broad corridor. He unlocked the door of his sumptuous suite, and it seemed to smell of emptiness and futility. These anonymous rooms, this hired and unfriendly furniture! No home for a man here—Home? He

had never known such a thing or desired it. He had laughed at domestic virtue, the dullness of a decency that did not dare adventure.

He locked the door, and just as he was lay down on the bed.

Someone knocked. He ignored the knock.

He lay there while the sunlight faded, and the room grew dim and grey. Self-scorn, self-abasement. The challenge of his youth was too strong for him. He was finished. So why not finish?

To many men after the shock of some emotional storm has come the impulse to self-effacement, and it came to Maxwell Tryte in that darkening room. It was no mere splurge of gross self-pity, but the feeling that effort and struggle and all lovely anguish were beyond his strength. How could he meet her challenge? It was too much, too fiercely tantalizing. In the flesh he was no mate for this graceful, swift footed girl, and in the spirit——? He was old, so old. How could he match the exquisite energy of youth? It could not be done. She would end by despising him.

Another knock, and the voice of Pierre.

"Monsieur—I have the menu for dinner."

Maxwell Tryte sat up. Dinner? How superfluous! Should not that marvellous meal on the heights be his last?

"Thank you, Pierre, I am going out."

"Very good, monsieur."

He rolled off the bed, turned on the light, looked at himself in a mirror, and reverted to the semi-darkness. The chill of the southern sunset was still in the air; he felt it and shivered. Oh—these quakings and frailties of the flesh! Why not finish with his damned body, and all its helpless provocations? He had spoken to her of the crossroads, and his road seemed to lead to the sea.

He put on his hat and overcoat, and went out and down the stairs. He did not want to meet anyone, or to be looked at by human eyes. The white pillared hall was almost empty, and he limped through it to the swing doors. He was out in the night, a clear and vivid night that would be brilliant with stars. Star-

dust, music, impossible dreams. The desire of the moth for the flame. He passed down through the dim garden.

The windows of the casino were ablaze, sending out shafts of light upon the palm trees which looked like huge black feather dusters prepared to sweep the white walls. People were crowding down the steps, people who had been gambling, dancing, sitting gossiping over tea-tables. Cars pulled up under the port-cochere, drove away. Max flinched from this pleasure house. How often he had amused himself there, danced, gambled. He had never danced with Rowena, and never would. He remembered that night when she had snubbed him. Some blond and naval Bill was the lad for her. Yet, though he flinched, some impulse drove him to the lights and all the va et vient of the place. The moth to the candle before it fluttered down—scorched into the darkness. He would pass those steps, dare the live glare of the windows. He was past them, and moving into the half light beyond when a voice called to him.

“Max, Max!”

Her voice!

For a moment he stood still, as rigid as any Lot’s wife. His impulse was to run, but his legs seemed frozen. Then he heard her hurrying feet, and turned to face her.

“Max, I’ve been trying to phone you. There’s a Bal Fleuri here to-morrow. What about——?”

She was close to him now, and she saw his face, lit by the casino lights and backed by the darkness. He was without his glasses, and his eyes looked large and luminous, bleeding eyes,—if such things could be.

“Max, what’s the matter?”

He stood shaking at the knees. His lips moved, but for a moment no sound came from them.

“Max, what are you doing here?”

He heard his own voice say: “I was going to drown myself.”

She got him to a seat on the plage, an empty seat under an ilex. She was most profoundly shocked. She believed him. His face had been the face of a man drowning in despair.

“My dear, what are you saying? Why?”

She had an arm round him, and he seemed to cower against her.

"I can't go on."

"Max!"

"How can I? I'm—I'm crocked, done for."

"My dear!"

"I can't face—what I wanted to face."

"Life?"

His head was down. He saw one of her hands, and put his lips to it.

"No, you."

Did she understand? Perhaps not yet. She was too young and of the open air to know the anguish of self-defeat. But deeply moved she was.

"Why me, Max?"

Sudden shame gave him strength. He straightened, and drew away a little, almost against the pressure of her arm.

"Oh, what a craven brute I am! How could you understand?"

"I might."

"No, no more confessions. Let it go."

He sat with his head down, suddenly assailed by the thought of the strangeness of their being together like this in naked emotional contact, two creatures who were almost unknown to each other. Her arm had moved, and her hand rested on his shoulder. She was looking out over the dark sea with an intensity of self-questioning. Why had she had so terrible an effect upon him? Did it mean——? Mere vanity was less than dust under her feet. No cheap elation tittered in her.

"Max."

"Yes, Rowena."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Yes, terribly afraid."

"My dear——!"

He was head up now, and somehow man.

"Shall I tell you? No, I won't. I suppose I used to be a facile sort of cad, glib as grease. I am not going to play any such game now. My innards have turned to water. Ever been frightened to death—of something?"

She answered him very gently.

"No."

"May you never be. Come, let's go. Somehow I feel that I have washed in Jordan, and the funk is out of me."

"Promise——"

"My dear, there is no need. You have put that out of me. Come."

He rose and she with him. She tucked a hand under his arm.

"Who is seeing who home?"

"I am seeing you home."

"Maybe that's as it should be."

"It should."

They had reached the lights, and suddenly turning to look at her he found her face all soft and luminous, and it was like light after darkness.

He said: "How lovely you are. If I could paint you like that."

She answered: "Why not?"

They parted in the garden of her hotel, but not before other words had passed between them. They had stood under a flowering mimosa vaguely pale and fragrant in the semi-darkness. Maxwell Tryte had looked at the ladders of lighted windows.

"What pigeon lofts these places are, glorified hencoops. I wish——"

"The wish is—— Well, why not? You know, I have never seen it."

"You mean—my place?"

"What else?"

Her hand had still been tucked under his arm.

"Care to see it?"

"I'd love to."

"To-morrow? But what about your tennis?"

"Think of your picture, Max."

"Subtle retort. Shall I——?"

"Yes, any time."

"Morning, sun shining, flowers smelling. Am I being a sentimental ass? By God, Rowena, I've made a vast discovery."

"Have you?"

"It may be good to be a sentimental ass. The ass and the prophet and the angel of the Lord. Good night, oh—Queen. I want to go—now."

"But what time, Max?"

"Ten o'clock too early?"

"No."

"I'll come in a car."

Maxwell Tryte walked back to the Hotel Mimosa with a feeling of strange stillness within him. Was it possible that an hour ago——? The scourge of a self-effacing fear, panic, passionate self-pity! Of what mind and miracles was man! His guts had turned to water, but now—there was a kind of flame in them, but a flame that could leap and laugh.

He began the climb to the hotel. He looked up at its great white façade and its windows. Were they laughing, winking at him? "You craven fool, back again? Did youth put her lips to yours, and blow a new breath into your body?" A flash of humour flickered in him. He raised his hat to the Hotel Mimosa.

"Oh, Palace of the Idle and the Finished, I salute you. Something has begun in me again. Will it be easy? No, damned difficult. God should give man difficult things to do."

He walked into the warm, well-lit hall. He saw Lady Marsland there, and he saluted her with gaillard courtesy. He strolled up the stairs and met Pierre in the corridor.

"Ha, Pierre, I am dining downstairs. Will you ask the Maitre d' Hotel to find me a table?"

"Certainly, monsieur. Monsieur is feeling better?"

"Much better."

Maxwell Tryte entered his room, turned on the lights, and threw his hat and overcoat on the bed. He turned on the bath-water in the white-tiled bathroom. He washed and felt clean. He took out a white shirt and put studs and links into it. And precisely at eight o'clock Maxwell Tryte walked into the dining-room and was bowed to a particular table by a smiling head-waiter.

He sat down. He asked for the wine list.

People looked at him curiously.

There was staying at the Hotel Splendide a very notable young man, Guido Fratelli, the Italian tennis star. Some Italians are fair, and so was Signor Fratelli. He had a head like golden butter, polished and waved, amber eyes, and a smile that made some maidens fall into bewitched stupor. If Signor Fratelli was a very vain young man and exuded charm like a tuberoses, the world of women had made him so. They would crowd to the court where he was in action. Sex-appeal crowned him the desired victor.

Guido Fratelli was in search of a partner for the mixed doubles at the St. Martin Tournament, and he was pious about partners. Loveliness was more attractive to him than a safe backhand and mere reputation. Moreover, Fratelli was rather more fond of conducting a pretty partner to victory than of sharing it with some tigerish tough. Fratelli had met Miss Rowena Ravenstock at two or three shows the previous year.

After dinner that night he glided across to where she was sitting in the lounge, walking as though he knew that all eyes were upon him. Apollo, Mars, Mercury, the cynosure of the reserved seats. Rowena had a book in her lap, but her thoughts were utterly elsewhere.

Fratelli spoke good English.

"Pardon, Miss Ravenstock."

Rowena raised her head.

"Hallo."

"I seek a partner for the doubles next week. Would you do me the honour?"

Her dark eyes were intensely serious. Then they seemed to bubble into a smile, a rather baffling smile.

"Thanks so much, but I'm not sure whether I shall be playing. Better fix up with someone else."

And she lowered her eyes to her book.

Amazing business, but Apollo felt rebuffed. He had shone upon a girl who as a player was a second rater, and she had shrugged him off.

Head in air he strolled away, and as he went Rowena's eyes lifted and followed him. There was a dancing, naughty lustre in them.

The Butter Headed Hero!

Guido Fratelli might have served Max as a model in that Wimbledon drama. And suddenly she laughed, softly and secretly to herself.

XXXI

ROBERTO received a warning.
"Open all windows, open all doors. Have chairs in the loggia, and flowers."

The message put Roberto in an operatic mood. He showed all his white teeth; he sang. The Maestro was coming, and Roberto was a hard-working man and loved his garden, and liked to have the fruits of his labour praised. A little praise is a prime fertilizer. And, mark you, the Maestro had written "Chairs." Roberto, with a finger to the paper, declaimed to his wife on the suggestiveness of the plural. And, mark you, flowers. Well, the donna should have flowers, and might the good God grant that she was one.

It was a limpid day, and the sea playing Circe. Blue samite and the sun's track a great flashing Excalibur. Maxwell Tryte was wearing a grey lounge suit, a dove coloured hat, and no spectacles. He had bribed a barber to come up early and trim his hair and beard.

The car drew up to the Hotel Splendide. Rowena was sitting on the terrace. Her frock matched the mimosa blossom, and her slim legs were in black. Her hat was the most provoking thing imaginable. Max absorbed her and her significance in one ecstatic stare. She had dressed for him and the occasion, God bless her!

Maxwell Tryte opened the door and stepped out. In one night he had become more brisk and fluid in his movements. He stood bare-headed.

"The day is yours, and the sun shines."

Her eyes laughed.

"Did you order the sun to shine?"

"The sun is a gentleman to-day. How could he resist that hat?"

Guido Fratelli, strolling out on to the terrace with languid beauty, witnessed the scene, and was scornfully amused by it. Was that little fellow with the beard her other partner? Some meat-merchant with much money.

They drove along the Plage towards the headland and its pines. The blue bay was edged with rocks and lunettes of yellow sand. Rowena's hands lay folded in her lap. That cheeky little hat appeared to give her an air of feminine maturity.

Maxwell Tryte felt shy. That was a new and rather delightful experience. He had grown a new skin, or shed an old one, the thick hide of the hedonist.

"When do you start play?"

"What play?"

"The—game."

"A—game."

"No emphasis on——"

"Wimbledon."

They both felt silly, delightfully silly, and they laughed.

Then she said: "We have your model at our place. The butter-headed hero."

"One of the elect?"

"Oh, very much so. If he smiles upon you, you are expected to fall flat. Oh, look. Isn't that a perfect little place up there?"

They had reached the headland and the car was slowing down.

"How tactful of you."

"Why?"

"That's my villa. It salutes your hat."

Roberto was doing a little spying from behind a row of cypresses. He saw the car crawl past. He saw the Maestro, minus his spectacles. He saw the donna and her hat. What a hat, a veritable flower! And what a nymph! Roberto hurried

up along the cypresses to be there with a brilliant smile, and his Sunday hat saluting the lovely lady.

Roberto opened the door.

"Ha, Roberto. You have ordered the sun for us. This is Roberto, the producer of flowers."

Rowena smiled upon him.

"Good morning, Roberto."

Roberto gave her an operatic bow.

They got out, and Rowena stood looking about her with a little shimmery smile upon her face, and Maxwell Tryte stood looking at Rowena. Roberto, looking at both of them, put on his hat, and with benign discretion, walked round the car for a gossip with the chauffeur.

Maxwell Tryte waited upon her mood and that little shimmery smile. He had seen women smile over small children in that way, and had called it physiological. Damn physiology, and psychology, and all the ologies; life and fair women and flowers had the laugh of them all.

Her eyes came round to his, and he asked her the question:

"Like it?"

She nodded.

"You be—showman."

"Oh, my God," said he, "the very thing I must not be. Lead, lovely light, lead thou me on."

She gave a little laugh.

"Hymns—ancient and modern. What are you, Max?"

"The Song of Solomon."

"Which way?"

"Let's go up—and up."

"Yes, let's. You know, I am beginning to think I am awfully primitive. Me—the sophisticated modern."

"I should not have called you that."

"And what?"

"Oenone, and Hecuba, and Helen of Troy, and Beatrice and Mary Queen of Scots, and—Rowena."

"Oh, Max, what a mixture!"

"Aren't we all mixtures? The thing is that the right perfume should get to the top."

They wandered and so came upon Roberto's particular paradise. Roberto would take off his hat to it each morning. Sunny slopes set thick with iris and cistus, lilies, roses, sweet scented stocks, anemones, violets, tulips, narcissi. According to the English conventions their calendar was all wrong, but here they flowered together in profusion. The path was narrow, and in idling along it their arms touched.

"Did you make all this, Max?"

"Well, in a sense—I willed it. Roberto was Adam."

"So—you can will lovely things."

"Sometimes—I could, and shall—perhaps."

Suddenly from the pines above them a cuckoo's mate called, and Maxwell Tryte stood still.

"By God, an omen!"

She, too, was listening.

"You mean—the bird?"

"I do."

"What is it?"

He gave the other name.

"The wryneck. Haven't you heard it in England?"

"No. Does it mean the spring?"

"Yes, the spring is on its way to England."

It was right and proper that after climbing the hill he should lead her downwards by another path through a thicket of teucrium and rosemary to his little piece of England. The sun shimmered through the old olive trees upon the very green grass. Roberto had set the sprinkler going, and its four plumes curled and flashed. Here and there the grass was pied with purple and red anemones; tufts of narcissi coroneted the timber of the trees. Roberto, thoughtful soul, had set two chairs here.

"We call this—Little England."

She had her back to the sun and her slim shadow lay upon the grass and upon a patch of red anemones. She bent down, touched the grass, picked one of the flowers and put the stalk between her lips.

"By my soul," thought Maxwell Tryte—"I should paint you like that. Iseult of the Red Flower. Iseult of the midnight hair and eyes."

She took the flower again between her fingers.

"Who's idea, Max?"

"Mine."

"It would be. Have you ever painted it?"

"No."

"Oh, you should. Tell me, does a painter paint out of himself?"

"Sometimes, sometimes—not. And the inspiration may be mud or moonlight."

"Not much mud here. Let's sit. One could eat some lovely things. No, I don't mean quite that."

"Let's say—drink them."

"Yes, that's better. I could just sit here and——"

"Dream?"

"Perhaps."

"I'd like to paint you here, leaning against a tree with that red flower in your mouth."

"With hat?"

"No, charming as it is. Rowena among the olives."

She watched the flying water, and again the plaintive cry of the wryneck sounded in the wood above, and Max Tryte's eyes lit up. How different from the spring-call of a year ago!

When it was the Villa Violet's turn to be presented to her, Max Tryte understood the full meaning and impulse of the message he had sent Roberto. "Open all doors and windows." Yes, light and air, for this gay little house still had for him the smell of sickness, and the more sinister odour of a woman's treachery. The shadow of Josephine Bertrand might have passed from it, but it was not yet clean in the emotional sense. Mrs. Roberto met them, fat, amiable and smiling, and spread her hands and challenged the Maestro to go everywhere and see that the house was as it should be.

"I am sure it is, Maria. It is like Roberto's garden."

Mrs. Roberto gazed with round grape-eyes at Rowena. If this—by any chance—was to be the lady of the house—well—the Maestro had chosen a picture.

Rowena looked about her with dark, discerning eyes.

"Where is the studio, Max?"

Maxwell Tryte had become suddenly conscious of the villa's decor. It seemed to him cheap, a splurge of facile smartness, a politician's piece."

"I'm going to change all this."

"Are you?"

"Me no likee any longer. I'll have the whole damned place a virginal white."

So, they came to the studio, that long, colourful room with its great north window, its Persian rugs and divan, and its most pagan frescoes. There was a half-finished study on the easel, but that was all. All the implements and media of Maxwell Tryte's craft had been put away, and had been part of Josephine Bertrand's plan. The Maestro should never paint again; she would have seen to that.

Rowena sat down on the divan, but Max remained standing, looking about him with an air of ironic distaste. So, Josephine had closed the nursery and put away the toys. And those damned frescoes! A white-wash brush was the tool indicated.

He said: "I apologize—for everything."

She was looking at a particular frescoe, and he flinched.

"Yes, I did that. Pretty dastardly. One should grow away from being consciously clever."

He walked to the great cupboard with sliding doors each panel of which carried a Medusa head, in which he had kept paints, brushes, the smaller canvases, palettes, mixing dishes, cloths, his smock, and other oddments. He slid one of the doors aside. The cupboard had been emptied.

He said under his breath: "Well, I'm damned!"

He slid the door to and turned away.

"Let's go back into the garden. Everything here needs washing out."

But she did not move.

"Wait a moment. Isn't this where you will work?"

"Try to. But—first—a large distemper brush and a pail of——"

"Why not leave it all? I want you to paint me here."

He stood looking down at her as though trying to grasp the inner significance of her meaning.

"Paint you—here?"

"Yes."

"Not on your life, my dear. You are much too clean."

She was silent for a moment, looking at his easel.

"Max, if we change our outlook—— I don't quite know how to express it. Well, you know those funny old photos of grandfathers and grandmothers. Their clothes——"

"You mean——?"

"I suppose I am pretty green in some ways. You say you don't like all this any more."

"I find it nauseating. Stay green, my dear."

"Ought I to? Can I? Have you gone green?"

"I hope so, green as grass."

"Well, does all this matter? You had a fancy for funny clothes, or no clothes."

He gave a toss of the head.

"You—you—witch! You mean—keep it and laugh at it?"

"I think I do."

"By God, I believe you are right."

She rose and walked to the great window and stood looking at the mountains. He had a feeling that he should join her there. He did so.

"Max——"

"Yes, Rowena."

"When will you start?"

"What?"

"Painting me."

Her fingers touched his and he clasped them.

"Not yet. I've got to do my forty days in the desert."

"All alone?"

"Yes."

Her eyes shimmered.

"Is it going to be——?"

"No, damned difficult, blood and sweat."

"Well, why not work it off on me?"

"My dear!"

"Would it help?"

His fingers tightened on hers.

"Yes, I believe it would. But not in here. Outside—under the olives."

XXXII

DR. LOVIEBOND, pausing at the porter's desk, asked the ordinary kind of question that a man asks for the sake of offering or receiving social small-change. Also, Adolphe of the Hotel Mimosa was a person of some importance. Requested to ring up for a doctor he could exercise the privilege of prejudiced selection.

"Good morning, Adolphe. Mr. Maxwell Tryte in?"

"No, sir."

"Oh!"

"I think he has gone to his villa. A car was ordered for ten o'clock."

Dr. Loviebond rubbed his nose and passed on to the lift. He had other patients in the hotel, but his principal and most intriguing patient was Maxwell Tryte. Gone to the Villa Violet, had he, or for a drive? Dr. Loviebond had observed a certain pawkiness about his patient, as though Max had a joke of his own and was keeping it up his sleeve. Dr. Loviebond did happen to know that two days ago Maxwell Tryte had driven to Nice, and the doctor may have misconstrued the urge. Was this a sign of the times and of new well-being? Was Max reverting to his gay world? As a matter of fact Maxwell Tryte had spent more than an hour in Nice's most famous art-shop, selecting and purchasing new stock-in-trade, paints, brushes, canvases, etc. Madame Bertrand had consigned all the inflammable contents of the great cupboard to the kitchen stove; other more durable articles had passed away in the dustbin.

Dr. Loviebond was piqued. Why not follow up his patient? So, when he had completed his visits at the Hotel Mimosa, he got into his car and drove to the Villa Violet.

Roberto, hearing the doctor's car, came down from his carnation and violet frames to meet it.

"Morning, Roberto, is Mr. Tryte here?"

Roberto looked coy.

"Yes, sir. He is painting a portrait."

"Is he indeed! Splendid. In the studio?"

"No, sir, in the olive grove."

Dr. Loviebond climbed the winding path across the shoulder of a little hill, and saw the olive trees and the green and flowery sward below him. The figure of Maxwell Tryte was visible to him, poised on a stool in a patch of sunlight in front of an easel, palette in one hand, brush in the other. The doctor could not see the subject of the portrait, for she was concealed by the branches and the foliage, but Loviebond was sufficiently human to indulge in a little snooping. He followed the path until the rest of the picture came into view, a dark girl in a jade green frock leaning against the trunk of the old tree with a red flower between her lips.

Dr. Loviebond stood still.

"Well—I'm jiggered!" which was not a professional expression.

For Rowena was known to the doctor. He had attended her father last season during an attack of flu' and bronchitis. Miss Rowena Ravenstock, a young tigress, posing for Maxwell Tryte!

Should he go on or retreat? And while he was hesitating he overheard the following conversation:

"How is it, Max?"

"Not too good."

"Your hand is getting tired."

"A bit."

"Stop. And my anemone stalk is growing pulpy."

Maxwell Tryte laid brush and palette on the small table beside him, and regarded his work.

"Much blood and sweat needed yet."

She moved from the tree, and quickly he turned the canvas over.

"No, no exhibition yet."

He was holding his right hand like a dog whose paw has been trodden on. And Dr. Loviebond saw what happened. Rowena came and knelt on the grass, and took his hand between hers and rubbed it. Well, well! Dr. Loviebond stole back up the path, feeling benignly superfluous.

Life appeared to have presented Maxwell Tryte with a potent bottle of medicine.

When the Maestro asked Roberto whether his wife could produce a strong girl to help staff the Villa Violet, Roberto smiled one of his most brilliant smiles.

"She—is here, master."

"What!"

"A niece, master. For we said to each other 'The master will wish to come back. Let us be prepared.' "

Maxwell Tryte was touched.

"You are a good man, Roberto. I am tired of that damned hotel."

But on the very morning before leaving the Hotel Mimosa Max Tryte sat down at a table in the window when the sun was warm upon his hands, and scribbled the first page of what he believed might be a very revealing book. *Diary of A Super-Egoist*. Some title that! Almost he chuckled over it. Yes, yes, in the old days he had laughed at other people and made fun of them, but now he was learning to laugh at and make fun of himself. A purge for pride and self-conceit.

To him entered Dr. Loviebond.

"Hullo. Am I——?"

"Come in, Lovie. Putting four fingers and a thumb to work."

"How goes it?"

"Oh, rather so-so—as to the painting. I am going to make a museum of my new attempts. Interesting exhibition."

"I'd like to see them."

"You shall. Come along and have lunch at the villa tomorrow, and meet my bottle of medicine."

Loviebond laughed.

"I believe I have met—it."

‘When?’

‘Last season. I attended?——’

Tryte got up and looked out of the open window.

‘Sir Everard Ravenstock, Bart. He causes me to quake, Lovie.’

‘Should he?’

‘His nose terrifies me. I suppose I’m a sort of insect to——’

Loviebond was glancing at the manuscript on the table.

‘Not quite, my dear chap. Old Ravenstock isn’t a bad sort. Besides——’

‘Besides what?’

‘Oh, well, never mind. Queen Victoria is dead.’

‘Yes, dear old thing. She might not have been amused by me.’

The Tennis Tournament at St. Martin’s opened that morning, and Tryte had said to Rowena: ‘Fair does, oh—Queen. You watch me daub; I watch you play.’

Rowena had looked thoughtful.

‘You’ll make me nervous. I have to play that German woman. And she’s as stubborn as sin.’

‘But I want to——’

‘All right.’

‘I’ll miswish her. I’ll fix her with a malignant eye. I’ll put on my spectacles.’

‘No, don’t,’ said she.

‘Not sporting?’

‘No. You’ve got to grow out of spectacles.’

‘I’ll try to.’

The St. Martin Tournament might be a bijou piece, but it could be described as the gem of these affairs, because of its setting. The courts were sited on a little plateau between the sea and the mountains in what appeared to be a mysterious sanctuary or sacred grove of cypresses and ilexes. Nor was it all treed gloom, for those responsible had planted flowering shrubs and moraines of rock plants in this still and sheltered place, and on a windy day a lob fell where it should fall, and the chairs about the sunny arena were so many sun-baths.

Even the red courts looked gay in this pagan setting. And, strange to say, less tempers seemed to be lost here, and extravagant egoism enjoyed relaxation.

It was no distance from the Hotel Mimosa to the tennis-club and Maxwell Tryte strolled down just before eleven o'clock, carrying an overcoat and scarf. He had reserved a seat on the edge of No. 1 Court where Rowena was due to play the German frau at eleven-thirty. Max's seat was a comfortable basket chair with its back to the sun. The chairs on either side of him were empty at the moment. He preferred them to be so, and he hoped that they would be occupied by strangers.

The Club pavilion was very much alive. Officials were busy, players with coats over their white figures collecting in the veranda. Ball-boys in blue jerseys and berets were being noisy in a corner. A large man stepped down and chastened them. Max Tryte saw a young woman in white shorts arrive with three rackets under her arm. She had immense legs, bolster legs, and a chin that projected like the belly of a jug. The German woman? Probably.

Would Rowena wear shorts? He rather hoped not. He was preferring the decor to be feminine.

An elderly gentleman in a grey flannel suit and Panama hat, and wearing an M.C.C. tie came to take the chair on Max's left. They glanced at each other momentarily, the elderly gentleman with the suspicious unfriendliness of his caste, and there was silence. The elderly gentleman knew Maxwell Tryte by sight, but did not know what the devil to say to such a fellah. That was all to the good. Maxwell Tryte was here to watch Rowena make for him what might be a work of art. But, for Max, the chair on his right was to prove less propitious. There was a sense of something large, formidable and crepitant moving behind him, and subtly suggesting a golden and animated beehive floating upon wings. It was being conveyed to its appointed place by a very succulent and polite Frenchman.

Maxwell Tryte looked round and up. Lady Marsland!
He breathed a silent "Damn."

Lady Marsland sat down, if so stately and symbolic a process

as applying a regal backside to a chair could be described in such bald terms. Lady Marsland did it as though taking a seat on a public platform to the applause of an admiring audience. Lady Marsland was always—in public.

She smiled beneficently and with patronage upon Maxwell Tryte.

“Dear Mr. Tryte, how good to see you out and about. I do hope——”

Max smirked at her. Dashed super-barmaid!

“Have I straw in my hair?”

Lady Marsland raised blond eyebrows. What an extraordinary remark! But—then—of course—Maxwell Tryte was an extraordinary person.

“No, I cannot see any.”

“Thank you so much, I am greatly relieved.”

A broad pathway between palms and mimosa led from the gate to the club house, and Max was watching this path. It was stippled with human figures moving towards the courts, and among them Max saw Rowena with a young man at her side. She was in a short white skirt, and striding rather head in air, and paying no attention to the man beside her. Guido Fratelli had waited for her in the hotel garden. He too was a very public person, exuding radiance and charm, and if one took the stage with a comely girl beside one, that was a flower added to your hero's garland.

“Ah,” said Lady Marsland, “there is the Fratelli fellow. Such a good looking lad. And who is his latest?”

Max presumed that the question was pinned upon him, and he resented both it and its inference. Against certain persons the surest defence may be the assumption of supreme stupidity.

“Latest—what?”

“Pretty, my dear man.”

“You mean that Ganymede with the blue scarf? Yes, he is pretty.”

“No, I mean the girl.”

Max showed animation.

“Which girl? Where is she?”

Lady Marsland looked at him compassionately. Mr. Maxwell Tryte was without his spectacles, and gossip had it that his sight had been greatly impaired.

"Why—the dark wench with Fratelli. He always has a new one every season."

Max peered. He was more disturbed than he would have allowed.

"I don't see anyone with him."

"But, my dear man——"

She looked again and saw that Max was right. The great Fratelli was alone and ascending the club house steps, and saluting its occupants with a fascist gesture. The dark wench had disappeared.

"You seem to be right, Mr. Tryte. But—she—was with him."

"Walking up the garden path, perhaps?"

"Dear, dear, how these Italians pose. I gather that Mussolini tells them to."

"We all have little Mussos inside us, madam."

"Oh, I hope not. Such a greasy person. I'm sure I haven't. But—perhaps you mean——"

"Prodigies of pomposity," said Max, darkly.

He was provoked to put on his spectacles, and to turn down the brim of his hat. Lady Marsland was one of those dear creatures who drive a man to express extreme opinions and to feel a redness rising in head and heart. He made himself look at the Italian youth posing in the veranda on the other side of the court. Yes, veritable Ganymede, damned comely, and attractive to women. And Lady Marsland had cast Rowena for the part of—— Damn Lady Marsland! Sensual old bitch! But Max was bothered. As man to man Guido Fratelli made him feel horribly inferior, a bespectacled crock tucked up in a chair.

Then, the voice fell from heaven.

"Hullo, Max."

She had slipped in behind his chair.

"Hold my rackets a moment, will you. I've got a rock in my shoe."

Max got up, and his face revealed things to her. He took her rackets as though holding a bunch of flowers.

"Mustn't have rocks in shoes. I want to see you squash Germania."

"Afraid I shan't. Feeling jumpy."

With unselfconscious ease she put a foot on the back of the chair and undid the lace. Lady Marsland had her lorgnettes out; she was that sort of woman. She looked at the white shoe and then at the face of the girl. Dear, dear, Mr. Fratelli's latest.

Rowena had her shoe off, and balancing on one foot, removed the pebble.

"Good omen," said Max.

She bent down and put on her shoe.

"Oh, Max, I've got a spare eye-shade. I'll give it you. Rather a glare this morning."

"I've turned my hat brim down."

"No, be a good boy."

"I will be—and always."

Lady Marsland had lowered her lorgnettes. She was a person who could not be kept out of the picture, and when in it she assumed—as by right—a central position. Now—who was the girl? Lady Marsland was not conscious of having put a foot in it. Moreover, so regal a hoof could consecrate any situation.

"Oh, Mr. Maxwell Tryte, please——"

Max turned and looked down at her through the stringing of Rowena's rackets.

"Please introduce—us."

At that moment the voice of the official in control called for Rowena.

"Miss Ravenstock, is Miss Ravenstock—here? Miss Ravenstock wanted."

Rowena took her rackets from Max.

"Oh, there's old Simon shouting. I'll send a ball-boy round with the shade, Max."

"Good luck, my dear. I'll use the evil eye."

"Not sport, darling," and she fled.

Maxwell Tryte sat down in a new heaven. She had called

him darling. Oh, exquisite moment! But Lady Marsland was waiting like a large cow at a gate.

"Dear Mr. Tryte, how charming. Is she——?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I thought she was French."

Max looked at her over the tops of his spectacles.

"French be damned, dear lady. English—and without tears."

"Miss—er——?"

"Ravenstock."

"I seem to have heard the name."

"Quite likely. Daughter of Sir Everard Ravenstock, Bart., of Tanwood, in the County of Surrey."

That was a mouthful for the cow to chew.

"Why—of course. Dear Sir Everard. He was here last year, and he—and the Duchess of Downshire—and I—and the Honourable——"

But Max was not listening. Rowena and the German woman were walking on to the court, vividly in contrast, but Max did murmur something that sounded like: "Put Debrett in the incinerator and burn him."

A competitor slid in between the rows of chairs and brought Max the eye-shade.

"Rowena sent you this, Mr. Tryte."

She was a fair young thing, and as it happened a fan of Maxwell Tryte's, and thrilled with the chance to speak to the great man.

Maxwell Tryte rose and took off his hat to her.

"Thank you so much, very charming of you."

She hovered on one foot, blue eyed and eager.

"Could I have your autograph, Mr. Tryte?"

"With pleasure."

"May I bring my book round—presently?"

"Do."

Tryte sat down again to watch Rowena and Germania engaged in a knock-up, and in trying out services. What contrasts they were, the German woman massive and truculent, Rowena slim and fleet of foot, fluid and graceful in all her movements.

The gazelle and the she-bull. To the casual eye the English girl had every physical advantage, but when you watched the German's flat drives and noted the size of that florid arm, you might wonder. The German had the reputation of being a grim stone-waller who never tired, and who could return the ball until exasperation or boredom drove an opponent into making wild shots.

The umpire looked at the ladies and called "Play."

It was Rowena's service, and she appeared nervous; she double faulted twice and lost the game.

"Tut-tut," said Lady Marsland, "temperament, I'm afraid."

Max gave her an evil glance.

"Cart-horse," said he.

Her ladyship referred the phrase to Germania.

"Quite. But isn't that rather—undiplomatic?"

Max was silent, wishing her to be the same.

Rowena was losing the first set. There was no doubt about it. She could not get her game going, and she had no luck. Potential winners dropped an inch over the line. And the jug-faced tough opposite her appeared to be imperturbably in the right place on those repulsive legs of hers. Max began to hate those legs. He wanted to put them and her on paper. Was Rowena to be beaten? He found that the thought of her being beaten hurt him, and quite acutely so. It seemed to him that this was more than a game, and that something that was lithe and lovely and lovable was to be crushed by that she-Teuton, that implacable and efficient brute with the legs of a Nazi bully.

The crowd's sympathy was most obviously with the English girl, for when she did make a winner there was applause. Even Lady Marsland clapped patronizing hands.

"It's a foregone conclusion, I'm afraid. Frau Schmidt is so terribly steady."

"Look at her legs," said Max. "Could she be anything else?"

There was a chuckle from the silent sahib on Max's left.

"Yes, foregone conclusion. If I were your friend, sir, I would try other tactics."

Max turned to him.

"Would you. How?"

"Go up and volley. The German is out-driving her."

"I wish I could——"

But Frau Schmidt had made the winning shot of the first set, and was crunching a lump of sugar. They passed each other in the cross-over. Rowena smiled at the German, but there was no answering smile on the German face.

"Good girl," said M.C.C., "could you——?"

Max beckoned, and Rowena diverged towards Max's chair. She smiled at him and gave a toss of the head.

"You got the eye-shade?"

"Yes, but Rowena. Our friend here says why not go up to the net?"

Rowena glanced at Mr. M.C.C. He nodded.

"Try putting her off her game."

"I'll try it. But she's——"

"Solid on the leg. Try melting the fat."

Which was impolite of Max, but no one seemed shocked, and suddenly Rowena laughed.

"It's an idea."

It proved to be more than an idea. Max's rude joke and her own laughter appeared to lift Rowena into a dare-devil mood. A sudden change came over the game. Rowena, following up a fast first service, took her first volley with nice crispness and put it away. The crowd applauded. The seeming loser was fighting back. Moreover, Frau Schmidt was not utterly insensitive and without temperament, and that successful volley and the crowd's favouritism annoyed her, caused her to lose her touch and her fat and implacable sureness. She began to lob defensively, but Rowena drifted about like a white feather and gave Frau Schmidt even better lobs in return. She had found her form, and it became a running match in which Rowena's fluid and flowing lightness made the German legs look what they were.

Max grew more than excited. He sat on the edge of his chair and loved her for her spirit, her swiftness and her grace. And to think that he——! Oh, great shot! Splendid! Good girl!

Mr. M.C.C. was also becoming animated.

"She'll do it—if she can keep that up. By Jove, what a pretty mover the child is."

Max looked at him benignly.

"It seems that you were right, sir."

"I hope so."

Rowena won her set, and Lady Marsland was not so pleased as she should have been. In the cross-over and during a minute's rest the German woman crunched sugar and drank a whisky, but Rowena came across to Max's chair, and Max forgot the audience.

"Splendid, darling. Wish I could paint as you play."

Did Rowena blush? No, but her eyes were dancing.

"So you can. I'll try and keep it up."

"Run her about, my dear," said Mr. M.C.C. tersely.

Rowena laughed.

"I say, we're not being sporting, are we?"

Said Max: "You are playing a German, darling. And don't forget it."

That third set was a twister. Frau Schmidt recovered her touch and her length, and led four—two.

"She's going to lose after all," cooed Lady Marsland.

Max countered most rudely.

"Sez you!"

But Rowena did not lose. She made it four all, and ran Frau Schmidt all over the court. Max gloated. Those beastly legs were shiny and purple, and there was most unfeminine sweat on the Bosch face. Good business, great business! The games went to five all, but Frau Schmidt was blown and shaky. Rowena took two games in succession, and the match was hers.

Max did a most unsporting thing. He threw his hat in the air, fumbled the catch, and had to recover it. Rowena and Frau Schmidt were shaking hands, but there was no smile on the German face. Max put his hat on, and trespassed on the court. Damn the conventions! Damn everything and everybody!

"Oh, Max——"

"Come on, let's——"

"Let's what?"

"Get away and drink something."

He tucked a hand under her arm.

"Am I proud? This way. You must be rather done."

"I don't feel it."

"Where's your coat? mustn't catch cold."

"I'll get it."

It was in the avenue of palms and mimosa that he spoke those significant words.

"It would have hurt me—quite horribly—to see you beaten."

A shimmery look spread over her face.

"Then I mustn't play again."

"But, darling, you move so beautifully. I couldn't put it on paper."

"Couldn't you?"

"No."

"Try."

And there—in that almost public place, he kissed her.

XXXIII

SIR EVERARD RAVENSTOCK was shocked. His little girl confessing to a tenderness for that bounder—Maxwell Tryte! Rowena might be like her mother, but then her mother had married Sir Everard, which, of course was another matter. Whether it is that large noses postulate intellectual limitations, Sir Everard, though a warm-hearted man, was angry. He continued to think of Rowena as "His Little Girl," and to be sentimental about her, and to resent the prospect of having a Blondie foisted upon him as a son-in-law. Good God, sir, I ask you! Had the subject been less domestic and personal, Sir Everard might have written to the *Times* upon it. "Now, Sir——" "I appeal to you, Sir," "I remain your obedient

servant, Sir." But you could not write to the *Times*, on the problem of an innocent's crass folly in developing a passion for a profligate painter fellow who also scribbled impudent and convention-crushing books.

Sir Everard bundled over to Maythorn, taking his corners like jumps, and ploughing through emotional water-splashes. He found Valentine Samson smoking a pipe in the parlour after his elevens. It was a cold day, and the north-west wind and anger had empurpled the prodigious nose. Sir Everard flung off his overcoat as though preparing to fight some blackguard. In the old parlance Sir Everard appeared to be in a towering temper.

"Want your advice, Sam. What d'you think? That girl of mine——"

Valentine Samson said: "Yes, I know. Have a whisky."

"Damn whisky. So—she—— I want your advice."

"No you don't," said the sailor. "You want me to tell you that it's—a disgusting business."

"Well, so it is. I am going out to bring the little fool home."

Valentine Samson sat contemplating the bowl of his pipe.

"I shouldn't," said he, as though addressing his pipe.

"What!"

"I shouldn't."

Sir Everard was walking about the room in quite the old-fashioned paternal manner.

"I'm surprised at you, Sam."

"Sorry, but I shouldn't."

"You mean to say you would let the girl make a tragic ass of herself over a septic little cad like Tryte?"

Samson looked up at him with a half-concealed smile.

"No, of course I shouldn't."

"Well, damn it, where are we? If——"

"Hold on a moment, old man. I think you have got a rather false picture—of Tryte."

"Oh, have I! Why—the fellow was notorious. Womanizing little blackguard."

"Perhaps, perhaps not. You know—women chucked themselves at him."

"The bloody fools."

"And bored him."

"Bored him?"

"Yes. You see, old man, Tryte is a bit of a genius, and to straightforward fellows like ourselves—genius is a little bothersome and puzzling, but there is such a thing as the Grace of God."

"Why, the fellow's an atheist."

"Was."

"How d'you mean?"

"Before the crash. Sit down, old man. I'm wondering whether I ought to show you something."

Sir Everard sat down, but rather like a man conscious of the virtue of tolerance while presiding at the local "Bench" during the hearing of a particularly repulsive case.

"Something to show me."

"I don't know whether I ought to."

"Why not?"

"Breaking confidence, letting you look into another man's secret soul. But wait a moment. Ever considered Rowena?"

"That's just what I am doing."

"No, I don't mean in that way. Have you considered her as a person, not just as your daughter?"

Sir Everard rubbed his nose.

"Well, I know she takes after her mother."

"Quite. Phill was a somewhat unusual person."

Sir Everard gazed at the fire.

"She was. And by God how I missed her, and do still. That's what makes me——"

"I know, old man. Rowena has much of her mother. You can't coerce certain people for what you think is their good. Besides—good isn't the same for all generations. I may feel young at sixty-five, but I'm not young like the young."

Sir Everard nodded.

"But this fellow Tryte must be fortyish."

"Not quite. I wonder if I ought to show you that letter."

"One from Rowena?"

"No, the one from Tryte. Yes, damn it, I will."

Samson left his chair and opened the flap of a bureau. He glanced at the letter, hesitated, and then gathered it up.

"Writing a bit shaky still. The poor beggar's hand has to learn things over again. Read it, old man, and digest it. I'll go out for five minutes. Will wanted to talk about something."

So, he left his friend before the fire with that most revealing letter, and wandered down through the apple trees to where Will had a bonfire of hedge-clippings. It was rather a lovely sight that fire with its burning heart and the white smoke billowing. Almost it was a sign and a symbol, and Will the arch-priest and magician presiding over this cleansing ritual, for Will was burning docks and couch as well as hedge-clippings.

"Good business, Will."

"It be, sir. Those darned weeds won't terrify us no more."

"The sins of the soil, Will, or what are sins to us."

"Suppose God—he did make 'em, sir, but for why?"

"God knows!"

When Samson returned to the parlour he found Sir Everard squatting on a footstool close to the fire. He was warming his hands, and the letter lay beside him neatly tucked into its envelope. Sir Everard had passed through a strange experience, that of feeling how another man felt, and felt with tenderness, wonder and humility about the familiar figure of his own child. Was Rowena like that? Well, her mother. And could a cad write such a letter? Well, hardly so. Had he misjudged——?

"I think I'll have a whisky, Sam, after all."

"You shall."

"It has given me a bit of a toss, that letter."

"Still mean to go out?"

"Yes, I do, but differently."

"Good business, old man."

Dr. Loviebond was going to lunch at the Villa Violet, and having finished his morning's work earlier than he expected, he drove to the villa about half past twelve. Incidentally, he had met Max Tryte's vial of Elixir Vitae, and accepted its dark potency. In the loggia he saw a little table set out, garnished

with glasses and bottles, and the physician in him was challenged. Would Tryte revert to other elixirs?

No one was in evidence, and the doctor, finding the salon empty, strolled on to the studio. He opened the door, to pause, posed by a peculiar sight. Ranged along one wall were a series of canvases, all studies of the same subject. The room was empty, and Loviebond was still hesitating when he heard footsteps on the stairs.

"Hullo, who's that?"

Almost, there was anger in the voice and its challenge.

"All right, old man, no burglar."

"Oh, it's you, Lovie. You're privileged. I thought I had locked that door—on my new chamber of horrors."

He came down to join the doctor. He was without his glasses, and his face had a peculiar transparency. Loviebond, searching for words, could not find any to describe it. Freshness, no, openness, no. Well, never mind.

"Had a look?"

"No."

"Go in and look. They are arranged in series—left to right. I think they are—well—utterly inadequate. I can't get things down on canvas as I used to do."

Loviebond walked into the studio and looked at the pictures, all studies of a girl in the same setting and in the same pose. Max strolled across to the divan and sat down. He was smiling like a man who could laugh caustically yet with humour at his own work. There was silence.

Loviebond was puzzled, and more than puzzled. He had an eye for pictures and not a little knowledge of them, and this work of Tryte's provoked him. Crude? No. Simple, in a way, yes. Tryte seemed to have discovered a new manner. But, so far as its effect upon him personally was concerned, Loviebond was in no doubt, and as he glanced from picture to picture he could discern a definite gradation, a sureness of touch, more brilliancy, that something which is indescribable, the prerogative of genius, and the despair of the mediocre man. Yet, there was more than this, and the doctor stood groping for a diagnosis, the intuitional flair behind the senses.

Was that it? A new Maxwell Tryte behind the brush, a man—whom in the good old parlance—the Angel of the Lord had visited in the shape of a young virgin? The impudence of the playboy had passed. Tryte was seeing life and attempting to express it with a new passion and an almost childish reverence.

At last he spoke: "Max, I congratulate you."

"Don't, old man. I'm so damned dissatisfied."

Loviebond turned to him with that quiet smile of his.

"Isn't there virtue in that? You were pretty facile, you know. Things came——"

And suddenly Maxwell Tryte's face lit up.

"By God, Lovie, you are a sage and a physician. I believe you are right. Things came too damned easily. Now——"

"The blood and the sweat and the joy of difficulty?"

"Amen to that."

When they left the studio Maxwell Tryte locked the door and put the key in his pocket. For the time being his "Chamber of Horrors" was sacred to himself, and Loviebond had been its only visitor. There was a pact between Max and Rowena, and she had kept faith with him when he had said: "You shall not see yourself until it is less of an insult. Satisfied I shall never be. The exquisite You is beyond all art."

Not bad for a lover! So Max and his physician came out to the loggia where the sun was shining through purple bougainvillæa, and the little drinks waited on the table.

"Help yourself, Lovie."

"I think I'll have a Dubonnet."

"Good. I don't do it. Do you mind?"

Loviebond had picked up the bottle of Dubonnet.

"Not a bit. Feeling—austere?"

"No, not exactly that. Somehow I don't seem to need it."

The doctor smiled as he filled his glass.

"Life itself a good drink, what?"

"You have said it."

They sat down in the chequered sunlight, and Tryte looked at his hand and moved its fingers.

"It gets tired rather quickly. I suppose that's——?"

"Normal. Don't rush things, Max."

"I won't. Seems to me that's one of the things one has to learn—to let life come to you and not to leap at it and clutch it by the throat."

The doctor nodded and sipped his Dubonnet.

"True, old man. What do the greedy get but an hypertrophied greed? A little less means a little more."

Tryte was silent for a moment. Then he asked Dr. Loviebond a question.

"Tell me, Lovie, as man to man, is there any likelihood of this hand of mine going back?"

"I should say—none at all—if the delight remains in it."

"Thanks, old man. I think it will."

Sir Everard Ravenstock did not put up at St. Martin. He billeted himself at Monte Carlo, and took the train to the lesser place. He had not advertised his coming, and on that morning in March he set out for Maxwell Tryte's villa like an explorer with a mind as open as he could make it. Someone whom he questioned pointed out the Villa Violet to him, and he wandered in and up through that very exquisite garden. Sir Everard, as an Englishman and an Arcadian, had a feeling for gardens, and this southern pleasaunce of Maxwell Tryte's appealed both to his nose and his eyes. By Jove, didn't it smell sweet, stocks, roses, carnations, mimosa, violets. And the sensuous sweetness of it set other thoughts stirring in Sir Everard Ravenstock. If a man owned and cherished a garden such as this, could he be just a cynical and profligate rotter? Well, hardly so. The thing did not make sense.

Sir Everard was equally taken with the villa. What a sun-trap, and somehow clean and peaceful. He rang the bell and it was answered by Mrs. Roberto. Was Mr. Tryte in? Yes, he was, but not in the house. In her very sketchy English Mrs. Roberto explained that Mr. Tryte was among the olives, painting a picture. She would show Sir Everard the way. She took him to the top of the little hill, pointed downwards, and there she left him.

Sir Everard passed on, saw and stood at gaze. He beheld his daughter posed under the olive tree, and Max Tryte sitting on

a stool in the sunlight, his easel before him. A picture within a picture. Sir Everard rubbed his nose. Should he or should he not?

Then came an interlude. He heard the voice of his daughter.

"This one—is it, Max?"

Tryte smiled at her.

"Maybe—it is."

"Hand tired?"

"It gets a bit numb."

"Stop. Rest it."

Sir Everard saw his daughter leave the olive tree, go and kneel down and take Max Tryte's hand between hers. Gently she rubbed his fingers.

"Have you got it insured, Max?"

"I have."

"That's sensible."

"But not with any insurance company."

"Oh, but——"

Max bent and put his lips to her forehead.

"Here's my insurance policy, you, darling."

"Oh—darling."

"The most wonderful thing in the world."

Sir Everard rubbed his nose and havered. Was this stuff sickening? Well, no, damn it, somehow it wasn't. He could remember kissing Rowena's mother just like that, and blurting out almost the same words.

Sir Everard cleared his throat, blew his nose loudly and proceeded to descend the steep little path. The blowing of his nose might have been a trumpet call and a challenge. He saw his daughter get on her feet, look upwards, and then come a few steps towards him. Head in air, dark eyes darker than usual, warm lips set, she seemed to stand on guard. Was it to be peace or war? And Sir Everard understood and was a man of mixed emotions. The young tigress was ready to fight for a sick mate! Well, well, he had lost his daughter to another man, just as he had robbed another father of his daughter.

"Hallo, my dear."

"Hallo, pater."

Her dark eyes never left his face.

"Thought I'd run out here for two or three weeks. Weather—disgusting at home. Yes, I'm at Monte."

He looked at her, and he looked at Max—who was rising, and when Rowena saw the way he looked at her lover her eyes softened, and crinkles of light replaced black defiance. She put up her face, and her father kissed her.

Sir Everard was cheery and debonair. Well, damn it, he might as well do the thing decently.

"Well, Mr. Tryte, glad to see you are able to work again."

The other man smiled at him.

"Why not—Max, sir?"

"Well, why not. I suppose——"

"You have come just at the right moment, sir. I have something to show you."

Rowena glanced quickly and vividly at her lover. Then she pirouetted round, and went with dancing steps to the easel, looked and stood still.

"Oh, Max! Am I like that?"

Maxwell Tryte glanced at her father. He did not wink, but there was a something in that look which brought Sir Everard very much into the human picture.

"You might answer that question for me, sir."

Sir Everard flicked an eyelid, stalked round to the easel, and stood beside his daughter.

"By Jove, Mr.—Max, I'm not much of a judge, but it's a jolly fine bit of work. Flattery—of course."

Rowena dug an elbow into him.

"Pater!"

And Sir Everard chuckled, and winked again at Maxwell Tryte.

"Just so. No woman ever thinks that way. What!"

XXXIV

THE strangest thing about the whole business was that Maxwell Tryte, having recovered some of his craft and his confidence by painting a series of portraits of one particular person, began to fumble when he attempted any other subject. Shades of Dante Gabriel and Dante Gabriel's glowing wife! It seemed that a girl had reinspired him, and had become so central in his consciousness that his re-educated hand could not paint anything else. As in aphasia Maxwell Tryte's craft was left with one word—"Rowena."

"Max, you've done enough of me."

He looked at her with whimsical pathos.

"I can't do anything else."

"What! Darling, don't talk such nonsense."

"It isn't nonsense. It is strangely and absolutely true."

She knitted her young black brows over that. What supreme homage, but she did not take it as that.

"Do you mean to say, Max, you can't——"

"I do. Let the psychological gentlemen explain it. Quite Freudian—I suppose."

"Damn Freud. Nasty old man. But you have got to, Max."

"I've tried."

"Show me."

"No, dreary daubs. The last thing I did of you was a tour de force, sheer inspiration. I slump when you are out of the picture."

Rowena was lying on the grass under the olives. She turned over, plucked an anemone leaf and nibbled its stalk.

"Remedy—obvious. I've to get out of the picture."

Max looked scared.

"But, darling——"

"Oh, yes, I have. I was going to chuck tennis down here. I shan't. I'll join the pater at Monte and enter for the doubles."

"But——"

"Don't argue, darling. I'll set you something to paint, and I won't come back until you have done it."

That was her ultimatum. Baby must be a good boy and learn to walk by himself. Moreover, there was an inspiration and an urge in her autocratic young forcefulness. It was what Tryte needed, and what he might continue to need. She might have put it in the old vulgar slang: "Have some guts, darling, and paint something that is not lousy." Rowena was shedding slang, and discovering an inwardness that matched her lovely surface. She was not just perfect porcelain, a Dresden shepherdess and empty inside. To Max's question: "What shall I try?" she had an answer.

"Come, I'll show you."

She took him by the hand and led him up to a stone seat on a terrace from which all the brilliancy and beauty of garden, trees, rocky coast and sea were visible.

"There you are, darling."

"Can I?"

"Of course you can. Then I'll come back. And Max——"

"Yes."

"I want my portrait in the Academy. And those other three pictures, and—this."

Maxwell Tryte smiled at her.

"Rather a large order. I'm not exactly persona grata. I think they would take—you."

"They had better. But, darling, if they are fusty about the others let's have a private show all on our own."

"Our own?"

"Why—of course."

He raised her hand, bent his head and kissed her fingers.

"You humble me, my sweet, yet make me glad. You even make me man."

So, Rowena joined Sir Everard, and played—much to her own amusement—rather indifferent tennis, and was put out in the first round, to become a spectator of other people's play. Strange, that tender emotion should mess up your game! And did it matter? Not at all, save that her father appeared to be disappointed.

"You seem out of form, my dear."

"I am."

"Not—er—wörried?"

"Not a bit. I think it's like this, pater, when Max gets his game back, so shall I."

Sir Everard cleared his throat, and then mumbled something. Really, life did get you foozling! Who would have thought that this kid of his could take a fellow like Maxwell Tryte and his job so damned seriously? He would write to old Sam about it, though—so far as the conventions were concerned, Tryte seemed to have found his feet. Sir Everard had expected his daughter to marry some nice, blond, bucolic Bill. And yet she was his daughter. Extraordinary, astonishing! Well, well, he would have to make the best of it.

It was with a feeling of excitement that Maxwell Tryte sat down to paint Rowena back into his life. He knew the feeling so well, that tenseness, and strung-upness which possessed you at the beginning of the craftsman's adventure, a new picture or a new book. The virgin page, the clean canvas, what would manifest upon them, to the confusion of his own Credo, and the delicious confounding of his craft? For this was different, and how flippantly he would have made fun of it a year ago. The playboy had become man. He sat down to the task as some old Italian master might have set himself to it, with a kind of austere passion, humility, fearful wonder. In the old days his work had been so swift and facile, now it was to be difficult, intense, somehow sacred.

Sincerity?

How much insincerity there could be in this business of scribbling and daubing. Pose, conscious cleverness, the founding of some new fashion to fool a generation, the cultivation of a cult. It would seem that Josephine Bertrand had burnt that part of him, and almost like a naked child he wandered forth into a cold, clear, yet passionate world of new expression. Was it just self that you set out to express, the pirouettes of a florid personal vanity? Surely not. There were mysteries that transcended your little, cocky, corruscating self.

There lay the loveliness, the stuff that pressed upon your senses, light that was more than light, colour that had a mystery of its own. It poured in through your eyes and had to be reborn through your brush. Was man but a vehicle? Was it possible that if you surrendered in all humility to that other something, your work became luminous like the face of God? Well, would man ever know? What he might know—or feel—was that some mysterious power or spirit was permeating him and pouring into him a strange sense of being more serenely significant than mere carnal man.

So, he set to work like a knight sent by his lady upon some testing adventure, and from the very beginning he was challenged by a newness in his manner. Could a craftsman change his technique? Assuredly so. How many a man had shed the wilful exhibitionism of youth for the serene sanity of a mature art. Maxwell Tryte was not founding a school, or developing an ism, or experimenting with a new method of mutilating nature; he had his subject before him, and he set out to paint it as he saw it, almost as a Greek sailor or a Greek herdsman might have seen it and known it, and the nascent picture astonished him.

“Ye Gods, I’m going classic!”

But there it was, brilliant and beautiful and strange, the real tinged with the faint mystery of unreality. No modernist mess of monstrous deformity—this. Maxwell Tryte’s trees were trees, his sea a sea, and not perversions of some morbid cult of a self-advertised subconsciousness, but the thing was luminous and lovely, permeated—perhaps—with the insight of the over-sense. It grew and astonished the interpreter.

He could say: “Gosh, what has happened to me? I am painting like a child with God’s eyes.”

Now and again, when his hand grew tired, he would leave his stool and wander about the garden, feeling good, and full of a surprised humility. What would the critics say of the new Maxwell Tryte? Did it matter? Damn the critics! A craftsman had to express the urge that was in him.

He had one unsuspected critic, Roberto, who would sneak

up and look at the maestro's picture. And Roberto's reaction was significant.

"Holy Mother, but it is—just as I see it. Beautiful, beautiful! You know that it is right side up. Sometimes the maestro seemed to paint things upside-down."

For three weeks Maxwell Tryte worked upon the picture. He kept the pact. Once only did he write to Rowena. And she, contemplating that very simple letter, was moved by a very passionate curiosity. Had she set her Max too difficult a task? Should she——? But she held her hand.

Sir Everard was puzzled. Had there been a quarrel? Were these two cooling off? He rubbed his prodigious nose, and looked the question if he did not ask it.

"Er—how's Max getting on?"

"Max and I have a bet on."

"Oh! You mean, my dear——?"

"No, we haven't had a row. It's just something personal between ourselves."

Loviebond was the first person to view Maxwell Tryte's problem picture. Max phoned to him. "I want you to vet my first effort." Dr. Loviebond came, saw, and was—for some seconds—silent. An anxious Max hovered behind him.

"Think I've gone Pre-Raph, and Ga-ga?"

Loviebond smiled.

"I think it's the best thing you've ever done."

"Merciful fellow."

"Fudge, old man. You must know how——"

Max cut in on him.

"I'm not as cocky as I used to be."

So, the fatal letter came to Rowena.

"I am ready to be judged, oh Queen. The thing is finished."

It was a halcyon day, a Greek day, and Max sat in the sun between two towering cypresses, a gazebo from which he could watch the road. He expected a taxi, but no car appeared. Instead he saw a slim, saffron coloured figure following the

curve of the blue bay. It came and went between the pines. He was conscious of exquisite fear. Was it Rowena? Of course it was, lilting to him on slim black legs, a Greek girl on a Grecian morning. He waited until he knew that she must be close to the gate. Then he went down the path with the sunlight in his eyes.

She was there.

"Hallo, Max."

"Hallo, Nemesis."

Her eyes were tender.

"No, dear, don't call me that."

He opened the gate for her, and she slipped a hand under his arm, and they were silent, acutely conscious of each other, and of the strangeness of coming together. Her face seemed to float beside him like a flower on the mood of the morning, and he was full of wonder that she should be with him, and that she should care.

"You only wrote once, Max."

"I've been practising self-denial."

"I nearly rushed over to see that you were all right."

"Darling."

"It seems years and years. Am I any different?"

"Just a little lovelier, that's all."

She pressed his arm, and dreamed along with eyes half closed.

"Max——"

"Yes, my sweet."

"Aren't we being awfully sentimental? Quite silly."

"The sillier the better, oh Queen. When the world goes silly and simple again—it may be happier."

"Quite Victorian. Weren't they awful hypocrites?"

Max was silent for a while.

"I used to think so, but I've gone rather deeper into things. They set a pretty high standard, far higher than ours."

"And so——?"

"They couldn't always live up to it, and had tumbles, and so—appeared humbugs, poor dears—to us—who have no standards."

"Haven't we?"

"Oh, yes, now. It's easy for me, my sweet."

"Will it always be?"

"Ah, that's guessing!"

At a point where the path turned under a flowering peach he paused for a moment, holding her beside him.

"Look back, oh—Queen."

There was sudden mischief in her eyes.

"Can we?"

"Want to?"

"No. And you?"

"I've climbed out of an abyss of cynicism like a little monkey. Of course you can chuck me back."

"Max!"

"Aren't we forgetting the test?"

"Yes, wait a moment. I remember someone telling me that my mother was the most persistently—loving person. When once she gave—she gave for good."

"Great woman. I should like to have known your mother. Perhaps I do. Afraid of the promiscuous male?"

"I'll have to take that risk."

"I think you can. Come, the verdict waits."

The picture was there on its easel, but with a white cloth covering it. Max released her.

"I'll leave you to it," and he strolled away towards the path's end where a little cliff was hung with lavender and flowering stocks. He stood there, looking down at the sea and its laced petticoat of frail foam. Petticoats? Would the petticoat return to the world, and "Bags" be relegated to the dustbin? Could one feel romantic and mysterious in grey flannel trousers? Perhaps? He had a feeling that he would fight for the return of the petticoat, and that his Woman should be as flowery as the little cliff at his feet.

He heard her calling him.

"Max, Max."

She had the white cloth which had covered the picture in her hand, and she waved it as he came towards her.

"Oh, Max, it's——"

"Does the white flag mean peace?"

"My dear—it's—wonderful. You've got away from Picasso and all that."

There was laughter in his eyes, and more than laughter.

"So I have passed my exam?"

"Darling, I'm so proud. You know what that means? Courage."

He put an arm around her.

"Have we given up saying guts?"

She was folding up the white cloth as though it had done its duty.

"Max, why not? Wasn't that a rather nasty pose? We didn't believe in things, and we overdid the sincerity stuff, and debunked everything just because we were scared of being thought earnest. "

Max was watching her hands.

"The Importance of Being Earnest! Shades of——"

"Don't be flippant, darling. You're not—really—— Let's look at the picture again. Think of all that loveliness just having guts! Even the padres fell for the word——"

"To decorate their dog-collars with a smudge of sincerity."

"Yes, just that. I'm not going to be a coward any more, and funk having 'Slosh and Tosh' thrown at me because—because——"

"Someone is most utterly in love with you."

She let her head rest on his shoulder.

"You'll go on saying that, Max, won't you?"

"Could I help it? You've made me."

"Oh—no. But Max, you'll send—this—to the Academy."

"I'll try it."

"Try it! If the old idiots——"

"Now, now, mustn't abuse the elect. I see myself becoming one. But there is another picture I want hung more than this."

"Which one?"

"You."

THEY climbed the stairs together—arm in arm, but at the turnstile he released her and was feeling in his pocket when she forestalled him with a ten shilling note.

“My show to-day, Max.”

“You naughty——”

“It’s our private view, and I pay.”

The commissioner smiled at Rowena as he laid down her change.

“Thank you, Miss—— Very crowded to-day.”

It was.

When they were through the turnstile, Rowena linked her arm again in his. Her eyes were dancing, her lips luminous. Wasn’t this exquisite fun, sneaking in with the crowd to discover yourself hung on the line? And wasn’t it their show?

“Do you know which room, Max?”

“Over here to the left.”

He too was excited, though trying to look casual and quite uncelebrated. What a crowd! Women, women, women everywhere, on the seats, grouped in front of particular pictures, consulting catalogues, passing remarks. He had experienced many such shows as this, but never as now, like a beggar in disguise with the Princess on his arm.

“Max, is it over there?”

“End wall.”

She pressed his arm.

“I thought so. Look. What a jam.”

They insinuated themselves between serious, gazing figures, bumped into a stout lady who was stepping back and holding pince-nez to her nose. They apologized, though the fault was hers. They joined the fringe of the human semicircle that was grouped in front of the particular picture.

“Portrait of Miss Rowena Ravenstock.”

For they knew and had been told by the Press that it was

the picture of the year. And there was Rowena leaning against her olive tree in all the brilliancy of that sunlit scene. What colour, what finish, what marvellous technique! Here was a new Maxwell Tryte, a Maxwell Tryte who had excelled himself.

They were just two in a little crowd, a crowd that was silent and absorbed in gazing. Rowena's hand had found his. "There am I," she thought, "the thing of the year, and yet I don't feel uppish about it. The day is his." She smiled at her picture-self, and Maxwell Tryte's eyes were on her face. Was he feeling cocky? God forbid! He was conscious of a strange humility and of her.

Two women broke from the crowd.

"Simply marvellous. And what a lovely girl!"

Max could not help it. He smiled at the lady.

"Thank you, madam. And here—is the original."

The ladies stared, smiled, and went off thrilled, with their heads together. Then they turned to look.

"Yes, of course, my dear, it is!"

"I wonder if the little man could be——?"

"Maxwell Tryte himself?"

"I believe it is."

But Max was looking at Rowena.

"And what a lovely girl!"

"Max, you were naughty."

"I just couldn't help it."

THE END

